



Possibilities Literacy: Empowering learners for an uncertain world

Vlad Glăveanu^{a,b,*}, Catrinel Tromp^c, Constance de Saint Laurent^d

^a DCU Centre for Possibility Studies, Dublin City University, Ireland

^b Centre for the Science of Learning & Technology, University of Bergen, Norway

^c Department of Psychology, Rider University, USA

^d Department of Psychology, Maynooth University, Ireland

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ABSTRACT

In an era of rapid change, uncertainty and complexity, individuals and societies must develop new capacities to engage with the possible. This article introduces Possibilities Literacy as the cluster of inter-related competencies that allow individuals and groups to understand, generate and ethically act on diverse possibilities across personal, social, and cultural contexts. Drawing from cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, we propose a distinctive five-dimensional framework – Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets – each explored through three orientations: Constraints, Alternatives, and Agency. At each intersection, we identify key competencies such as reframing constraints, playful generation, co-creation, futures deliberation, and self-authorship. Together, these enable learners to recognize limitations as invitations, map emerging possibilities, act with resilience, and steward futures aligned with shared values. We offer a rubric to support the development and assessment of Possibilities Literacy across contexts and conclude by rethinking literacy itself not as content mastery but as the evolving capacity to navigate uncertainty and co-create shared spaces of possibility.

1. Introduction

In a world increasingly defined by uncertainty, complexity, and rapid transformation, traditional social and educational paradigms are struggling to keep pace. While knowledge acquisition and critical thinking remain essential, the future demands something more. It demands the capacity to engage creatively, ethically, and practically with the unknown (Glăveanu, 2020a; Montuori, 2023). This article introduces the concept of Possibilities Literacy – a novel framework aimed at equipping individuals, groups and organizations with the competencies needed not only to imagine, but also to act upon diverse possibilities in responsible and collaborative ways.

At its core, Possibilities Literacy is a cluster of competencies that help people understand, generate, and ethically engage with diverse possibilities. These competencies include the capacity to recognize and critically examine what is, and to imagine what could be. They also concern evaluating and choosing between alternatives, taking practical steps to implement and refine ideas, and collaborating and communicating effectively about possibilities. Finally, they involve reflecting on the ethical implications of potential choices and actions. This literacy is rooted in the belief that engaging with possibility is not simply a creative act, but a fundamental human propensity. Importantly, this propensity can be developed, practiced, and applied across domains. In this way, we actively build on past and present work on possibility thinking in education (e.g., Burnard, Craft & Cremin, 2006; Glăveanu, Karwowski, Ross & Beghetto, 2024).

* Corresponding author at: DCU Centre for Possibility Studies & Business School, Dublin City University, Glasnevin campus, D09 V209, Ireland.
E-mail address: vlad.glaveanu@dcu.ie (V. Glăveanu).

Possibilities Literacy also intersects with broader developments in Possibility Studies. This emerging inter- and transdisciplinary field explores how people and systems relate to the possible (see Glăveanu, 2023a, 2023b; Ross, 2023). Possibility Studies draws from the social and human sciences, arts and design, business and education. Across these domains, it foregrounds the dynamic interplay between imagination and agency in both mind and society. Possibilities Literacy operationalizes these insights by offering a framework for cultivating relevant dispositions, skills and ethical orientations in educational and organizational settings. In doing so, it contributes not only to academic discourse but to the urgent task of preparing individuals and communities for futures that are not yet determined.

To structure this new literacy, we propose a framework encompassing Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets. These five dimensions are explored through three interrelated orientations: optimizing the use of Constraints, conceiving and exploring Alternatives, and acknowledging and developing one's Agency. At each intersection, we identify a core competency that supports meaningful engagement with possibility. Examples include reframing constraints, playful generation, co-creation, futures deliberation, and self-authorship. Rather than offering a single linear pathway, the model reflects an ecology of interdependent capacities that evolve over time and through experience. It affirms that possibility-making is both imaginative and situated: rooted in context, values, relationships, and responsiveness.

The notion that literacy should evolve alongside society is not new. Scholars have long argued that literacies are socially constructed and historically situated (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). They respond to shifts in communication technologies, cultural practices, and epistemological needs. In this tradition, Possibilities Literacy represents a response to an age of uncertainty. It invites educators and learners alike to consider literacy not as mastery over a fixed set of tools, but as an evolving capacity to engage with change, complexity, and emergence. This shift is especially salient in light of calls to reconceptualize 21st-century skills (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Kim, 2023). In these accounts, such skills are often treated as capabilities that integrate creativity, criticality, and intelligence.

And yet, why call this a literacy? The term was not chosen lightly. Naming it as such signals both a recognition of its foundational importance and a commitment to its teachability. Literacies are not innate; they are acquired through experience, instruction, and practice. By framing possibility as a literacy, we move beyond treating it as a natural talent or rare capacity. We instead see it as something that can be learned, refined, and shared. This also aligns with efforts to democratize future-making. It helps ensure that more people – not just experts or elites – can participate in shaping the trajectories of our societies.

Finally, this framing also underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. Possibilities Literacy draws on cognitive psychology to understand how people perceive and process alternatives; on sociocultural theory to explore how contexts shape what is seen as possible; on ethics to guide responsible decision-making; and on systems and futures thinking to account for the interconnectedness and cascading effects of change. It brings together insights from across domains in ways that don't dilute their rigor but synthesize a more holistic understanding of human agency in a complex and volatile world.

In the sections that follow, we distinguish Possibilities Literacy from adjacent literacies. We then outline our five-dimensional model in detail. We also offer rubrics to support development and assessment. Later in the paper, we offer a practical case example illustrating how these dimensions can be cultivated through, for example, school-based workshops. We conclude by reflecting on what it means to be literate in times of emergence, not merely as interpreters of the world as it is, but as co-authors of what it might yet become.

Important to note from the start, this article is best understood as a conceptual and theoretical contribution. Our aim is not to present empirical data. Instead, we develop a coherent framework that synthesizes insights across creativity research, sociocultural theory, futures studies, and ethics research. Methodologically, the paper draws on an integrative literature synthesis combined with abductive reasoning (i.e., iteratively moving between theory and emerging conceptual insights) to construct a meta-framework for Possibilities Literacy. This approach mirrors established traditions in conceptual innovation within the learning sciences.

2. Why do we need a new literacy

The proliferation of literacies in recent decades (e.g., digital, media, information, visual, critical, and more) signals a growing recognition of the term. Navigating contemporary life requires more than just reading and writing. Each new literacy responds to shifting technological, cultural, and epistemological conditions, equipping learners with the skills to comprehend and act in increasingly complex environments. Yet, as the world accelerates into deeper uncertainty, it becomes important to articulate more explicitly the fundamental human capacity to engage with the possible. Possibilities Literacy seeks to foreground and integrate this capacity within a coherent framework.

The urgency of articulating such a literacy emerges from both empirical observation and theoretical developments. The interrelated challenges of our time are not amenable to static or reductive solutions (Haught-Tromp, 2016). These include climate change, technological disruption, political polarization, and systemic inequality, to name just a few. They require an orientation toward openness, adaptability, and ethical foresight (Ross, 2023). Yet existing literacies, though valuable, often fall short in cultivating this broader orientation. Digital literacy enables individuals to navigate information landscapes, but rarely addresses how people can use digital tools to imagine and shape alternative futures (Henderson, 2020). Data literacy focuses on decoding patterns and trends, but not necessarily creatively reconfiguring meaning or value (Kim, 2023). Futures Literacy, as advanced by colleagues such as Riel Miller (2018), provides important tools for anticipation and scenario thinking. Possibilities Literacy builds on this contribution by extending attention to the broader ecology of human possibility, including emotional resonance, social communication, and ethical reflexivity.

Transdisciplinary efforts within education have highlighted the need for integrative approaches capable of navigating complex knowledge ecologies. Examples include STEAM education (Aguilera, Ortiz-Revilla, 2021), Convergence Education (Herr et al., 2019),

and arts–science initiatives that promote creative, cross-domain meaning-making (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2001). These literatures demonstrate how educational innovation increasingly relies on bridging disciplinary boundaries. Possibilities Literacy aligns with this movement by offering a unifying framework for understanding how learners work with constraints, alternatives, and agency across domains.

Moreover, Possibilities Literacy builds on and extends this conceptual lineage. It integrates cognitive, sociocultural, ethical, and ecological dimensions of engagement with the possible. Literacies such as media literacy (Livingstone, 2004), critical literacy (Luke, 2012), and entrepreneurial literacy (Volkmann et al., 2009) have addressed aspects of agency, reflexivity, and innovation. Possibilities Literacy, however, treats the act of possibility-making as central rather than ‘one among many’. It repositions learners not only as recipients and interpreters of meaning, but as stewards of the future: agents capable of expanding, curating, and preserving the landscape of what can be imagined and enacted.

As such, Possibilities Literacy addresses a critical blind spot in educational and professional practice: the assumption that access to information or critique automatically leads to change. In reality, many individuals and institutions struggle not from a lack of knowledge, but from an inability to imagine or act upon meaningful alternatives (Escobar, 2023). Possibilities Literacy positions this struggle not as a personal failure, but as a cultural and systemic shortfall. From this perspective, it becomes something that can be addressed through the intentional cultivation of possibility-oriented competencies.

Naming this a ‘literacy’ is thus not merely metaphorical. It affirms the learnability and teachability of possibility-making as a core capacity. Literacies evolve as collective responses to changing needs. Traditional literacy enabled participation in textual cultures, and digital literacy enabled participation in networked ones. In a similar spirit, Possibilities Literacy prepares learners to participate in an emergent world of uncertainty, complexity, and transformation – and to help shape it. It invites a new pedagogical imperative: to educate not only for comprehension, but for imagination, resilience, and responsible action. In order to enact this imperative, however, we need to understand in more detail what Possibilities Literacy entails, i.e., its core dimensions and competencies.

3. Core dimensions of possibilities literacy

To thrive in a complex and uncertain world is to engage meaningfully with what is ‘not yet’, ‘not here’, even ‘nowhere’. Whether navigating career transitions, responding to global challenges, or simply wondering about the future, individuals and groups dwell within a dynamic landscape of possibilities. Some of these possibilities feel expansive; others are deeply constrained. Possibilities Literacy refers to the integrated capacity to perceive, generate, evaluate and enact these possibilities with imagination, discernment, and ethical sensitivity. It requires creative insight. It also requires attunement to the cognitive, emotional, cultural, and political forces that shape what becomes thinkable, doable, and desirable (Inayatullah, 2008; Sardar, 2010).

Possibilities Literacy draws on cognitive psychology, futures studies, systems thinking, and sociocultural theory. From this perspective, human agency is understood as an emergent capacity shaped through active engagement with constraints and alternative opportunities (Glăveanu, 2020b; Miller, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Importantly, it reframes constraints not as mere barriers but as essential catalysts for new possibilities. When related to deliberately, constraints can sharpen focus, surface hidden affordances, and catalyze creative breakthroughs (Tromp, 2023).

The framework we propose identifies five interdependent dimensions of Possibilities Literacy: Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets. Each dimension is examined through three core orientations: how individuals and collectives relate to Constraints, imagine Alternatives, and enact Agency. Rather than a sequential process, these dimensions function as a dynamic and interrelated system of competencies. Before turning to each dimension in detail, we summarize the overarching logic. In essence, Possibilities Literacy integrates the work of noticing, generating, negotiating, evaluating, and orienting toward the possible.

- *Perception* involves the ability to notice and reframe what is possible in a given context. It includes recognizing hidden assumptions, identifying invisible constraints, and discerning latent affordances. For example, the invention of the Post-it Note came from reframing a failed adhesive formula as a temporary-use product, effectively transforming a problem into a possibility.
- *Crafting* refers to the generative act of shaping new possibilities through design, experimentation, and iteration. This work is bounded and enriched by constraints that foster coherence, originality, and adaptive thinking. A classic example is Dr. Seuss’s ‘Green Eggs and Ham’, written after a bet that he could not create a compelling story using only 50 unique words. That constraint inspired a beloved children’s book. It also demonstrates how (self-imposed) limitations can spark creative breakthroughs.
- *Engagement* captures the interpersonal and cultural dimensions of possibility-making, including how ideas are shared, co-developed, contested, and embedded within social systems (Sawyer, 2017). The emergence of Wikipedia as a collaborative, open-source project demonstrates how people from diverse backgrounds can collectively create, refine, and sustain knowledge-sharing platforms, embodying the power of grassroots action.
- *Stewardship* centers on the ethical evaluation and long-term care of possibility spaces. It raises the question of what can be done. It also raises the question of what should be pursued, sustained, or relinquished in light of collective futures (Appadurai, 2013; Jasanoff, 2016). Ongoing debates over AI regulation, for instance, reflect a growing need to structure technological possibilities in ethically responsible ways.
- *Mindsets* underlie and support all other dimensions. This fifth element highlights the internal orientations that shape how people relate to possibility itself. It includes a positive stance toward constraints, openness to difference, and a sense of self-authorship in co-creating one’s future. These mindsets serve as developmental anchors, sustaining meaningful engagement with uncertainty across time and context.

The following sub-sections explore each of the five dimensions of Possibilities Literacy in depth, structured through their relationships to Constraints, Alternatives, and Agency (see Table 1).

Taken together, the five dimensions of Possibilities Literacy describe an integrated ecology of capacities for engaging with the possible. Rather than unfolding sequentially, they interact dynamically and support each other. The following sections examine each dimension in turn, beginning with Perception as the entry point to possibility-making.

3.1. Perception of possibilities: mapping what could be

Perception is the first dimension of Possibilities Literacy for a reason. It designates the capacity to notice, question, and reframe the world in ways that expand what is seen as possible. It involves both a sensitivity to constraints and a cultivated openness to alternative futures and frames of meaning. Through perception, individuals and groups begin to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, discern invisible limits, and glimpse emergent pathways.

3.1.1. Reframing constraints

Possibility perception begins with how individuals interpret and work with constraints. These may be cognitive (e.g., assumptions), cultural (e.g., norms), or systemic (e.g., institutional rules). The key skill is constraint recognition and framing (Tromp, 2023, 2004; Tromp & Glăveanu, 2023). It involves identifying visible and invisible constraints. It also involves interpreting them in ways that open rather than close off potential. This includes perceptually differentiating between fixed, flexible, and faux-fixed constraints, and understanding how focusing versus exclusionary constraints shape what is perceived as viable or meaningful.

For example, aging is often seen as an exclusionary constraint. When reframed as a focusing constraint, however, it can clarify values, foster intergenerational engagement, or open up new creative roles. Well-framed constraints also help manage possibility overload or the risk of paralysis in the face of too many choices (Schwartz, 2004). In this sense, perception is not passive observation but a creative act that (re)designs the possibility space itself.

3.1.2. Possibility mapping

Perception also involves the ability to map multiple possible trajectories. This includes discerning latent affordances, recognizing emergent trends, and distinguishing between probable, plausible, and preferable futures (Miller, 2007). This requires landscape awareness as well as a developed capacity for differentiating futures.

Landscape awareness refers to mapping the current structure of a system – its patterns, tensions, and potential points of transformation (Meadows, 2008). This might mean noticing how a neglected public space could become a site for civic innovation, or seeing beneath rigid categories to imagine new identities or relationships. Differentiating futures, meanwhile, trains learners to think beyond deterministic or binary outcomes, fostering a pluralistic mindset grounded in creative and critical foresight (Inayatullah, 2008). Such an orientation to alternatives expands the perceptual field beyond the present. It invites individuals to explore “what could be” in ways that are grounded, imaginative, and ethically attuned.

Table 1

Overview of the components and subcomponents of Possibilities Literacy.

Dimension ↓ / Orientation →	Constraints	Alternatives	Agency
Perception	Reframing constraints Reinterpreting limits to uncover hidden affordances and open new ways of seeing; includes awareness of assumptions and inviting serendipity.	Possibility mapping Identifying and distinguishing among imagined, counterfactual, and emergent possibilities; recognizing the contours of the possible beyond the present.	Deep inquiry Engaging with wonder, curiosity, and transformative questioning; seeking new understanding by interrogating what is taken for granted.
Crafting	Constraint navigation Working within and through limits to shape possibilities; adaptive thinking, problem-solving, and creative use of available resources.	Playful generation Using imagination, divergent thinking, and pretend play to generate novel ideas and explore paths unconstrained by immediate utility.	Iterative action Testing, refining, and realizing ideas over time; balancing uncertainty with decision-making through cycles of experimentation and feedback.
Engagement	Negotiating constraints Collaboratively defining and adapting shared limits, rules, or boundaries; managing power and participation in social contexts.	Co-creation Jointly imagining and developing possibilities with others; distributed imagination, dialogue, and emergent collective agency.	Participatory voice Expressing, asserting, and shaping one's agency in relation to others; includes empowerment, inclusion, storytelling, and relational autonomy.
Stewardship	Constraints triage Evaluating and prioritizing which constraints or possibilities to maintain, alter, or discard; an ethical decision-making process under uncertainty.	Futures deliberation Reflecting on preferable, plausible, and just futures; involves moral imagination, scenario building, and pluralistic futures thinking.	Value alignment Selecting actions consistent with shared values, sustainability, and dignity; aligning personal and collective futures with ethical commitments.
Mindsets	Constraint appreciation Understanding how constraints function and why they matter; developing a positive stance toward limits as necessary conditions for agency and meaning.	Openness to difference Cultivating receptivity to unfamiliar ideas, perspectives, and cultural imaginaries; a foundation for pluralism and learning from others.	Self-authorship Developing one's identity as a co-creator of the possible; internalizing responsibility and agency for shaping one's life and world.

3.2. Deep inquiry

Finally, perception as agency involves the capacity to question inherited frames and engage in transformative inquiry. This includes bias regulation or the awareness and disruption of cognitive filters like confirmation bias or anchoring (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). But it also goes further. Perception-as-agency cultivates an internal stance of wonder, curiosity, and metacognitive flexibility (Fredrickson, 2001; Ward, 2001). This stance enables individuals to interrogate what is taken for granted and to see the familiar with new eyes.

Strategies like analogical thinking (Gentner & Markman, 1997), deliberate reframing and cross-domain exploration foster this kind of perceptual agility. A policymaker who draws insight from biology or design rather than legal precedent is engaging in this form of deep inquiry. Moments of perception-as-action thus open space for transformative recognition and insight.

Taken together, these three orientations show that Perception is not passive observation but active possibility-making. Through Reframing Constraints, Mapping Possibilities and engaging in Deep Inquiry, individuals expand the contours of what can be seen and imagined. In the broader framework, Perception establishes the conditions for all subsequent dimensions: without widening the field of the thinkable, crafting, engagement, and stewardship cannot meaningfully unfold.

3.3. Possibility crafting: from the possible to the actual and back again

Crafting refers to the generative processes through which individuals and communities shape new possibilities. It is where perception meets practice, where imagined futures are iteratively constructed through experimentation, design and adaptive thinking. Creativity here is not boundless expression, but a form of disciplined improvisation within constraints (Glăveanu, 2020b; Kaufman, 2016).

3.3.1. Constraint navigation

Far from stifling creativity, well-framed constraints often serve as engines of innovation. These may include time limits, materials, rules, aesthetic forms or stakeholder needs. Within Crafting, the ability to engage in constraint navigation is fundamental – working within and through limits to enable rather than inhibit the generation of new solutions. Constraints provide structure, coherence and a point of departure, making experimentation possible by defining a workable sandbox for iteration (Stokes, 2006).

A classic example is the Apollo 13 mission, where NASA engineers designed a life-saving filtration system using only materials available on board. This form of adaptive problem-solving is not an exception: it reflects the everyday reality of crafting across fields, from product design to emergency response.

3.3.2. Playful generation

Crafting also requires the ability to playfully generate new ideas, often unrestrained by immediate utility. This orientation draws on divergent thinking, pretend play, metaphor and imagination. Possibility prototyping – developing low-stakes versions of ideas to explore form and function – is central here (Sanders & Stappers, 2008).

Playful generation enables learners to venture beyond the obvious, take risks, and explore novel pathways. It is this mode of thinking that allowed grassroots organizers during the COVID-19 pandemic to rapidly devise and test new social practices, like community fridges or mutual aid systems, without formal institutional backing. Imagination, when not shut down by premature convergence, can surface radical alternatives to the status quo.

3.3.3. Iterative action

Finally, crafting demands iterative action: the willingness to test, refine, and realize ideas over time. This includes both strategic flexibility and the judgment needed to choose which ideas to develop further. It is supported by adaptive coherence, balancing novelty with contextual fit (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Dorst, 2011).

Unlike blueprint-based approaches, iterative action embraces uncertainty and integrates feedback. Whether in civic design, educational innovation, or organizational change, it involves learning by doing. Action is taken not with perfect knowledge, but with the confidence that meaning and fit will emerge through practice.

Considered together, Constraint Navigation, Playful Generation, and Iterative Action illustrate how possibilities move from imagination into material and social form. Crafting translates expanded perception into experimentation, design and adaptive realization. Within Possibilities Literacy, this dimension bridges vision and enactment, ensuring that alternatives are not merely contemplated but actively shaped through disciplined creativity.

3.4. Engaging through possibilities: the social dimension of possibilities literacy

Engagement encompasses the interpersonal, cultural, and political aspects of possibility-making. Possibilities are not developed in isolation; they are formed and transformed through shared dialogue, distributed agency and social negotiation (Glăveanu, 2020a; Sawyer, 2017). This dimension addresses how people relate to each other in constructing and sustaining the possible. It is also a key reason why this literacy can be studied at both individual and group levels.

3.4.1. Negotiating constraints

Constraints in social life are rarely fixed: they are shaped, contested, and redefined through interaction. Negotiating constraints

involves the collaborative shaping of boundaries, roles, and norms in dynamic, power-sensitive contexts. It includes the ability to engage productively with institutional or cultural rules, as well as interpersonal expectations, in order to make space for new possibilities.

For example, in educational or organizational settings, students or employees may work together to challenge existing hierarchies or redesign processes that constrain meaningful participation. These acts involve collective redefinition of the “rules of the game”, balancing structure with flexibility. The ability to manage power dynamics and navigate differing interests is key here. In the end, possibility-making in social contexts depends on inclusive negotiation of what is permitted, valued or imagined together (Foucault, 1995; Glăveanu, 2020a).

3.4.2. Co-creation

At the heart of Engagement lies co-creation: the capacity to jointly imagine and develop possibilities with others. This entails not only shared goals, but also distributed imagination as the collective capacity that emerges through dialogue, listening, and responsive iteration. Co-creation reflects the interdependence of human creativity and the social environments that support it. It is often emergent rather than planned, and it relies on trust, openness, and a willingness to revise one’s perspective in response to others.

A powerful illustration of this is the development of the Linux operating system, where a global community of programmers collaboratively designs and refines open-source code through forums and shared repositories, demonstrating how distributed expertise and collective problem-solving can yield innovations beyond the capacity of any single individual or organization.

3.4.3. Participatory voice

Possibility-making also depends on the expression of participatory voice: the ability to assert one’s perspective and shape shared futures in relation to others. This includes not only participation in decision-making, but also storytelling, meaning-making, and acts of inclusion and empowerment. Participatory voice is especially crucial for those historically excluded from possibility-making. Whether through activist movements, youth councils, or informal communities of care, expressing voice can challenge dominant narratives and introduce alternative imaginaries.

Fostering participatory voice means enabling relational autonomy – not independence from others, but agency within a web of relationships. It ensures that the possibilities we co-create are not only shared, but shared justly (Sierra & Fallon, 2017).

Together, Negotiating Constraints, Co-creation and Participatory Voice foreground the fundamentally relational nature of possibility-making. Possibilities are sustained not only by individual insight, but through dialogue, power negotiation and shared agency. In the overall framework, Engagement situates imagination within social systems, reminding us that the expansion of the possible is always collective (even if, at times, contested).

3.5. Possibilities stewardship: building an ethics of possibilities

Stewardship addresses the ethical and long-term dimensions of possibility. It asks not only what could be done, but what should be done, and why. Stewardship connects imagination to care, and action to responsibility (Appadurai, 2013; Escobar, 2023). It challenges individuals and communities to evaluate potential futures with discernment and to act in ways that honor both present needs and future generations.

3.5.1. Constraints triage

The first task of stewardship is constraints triage or the ability to assess which constraints or possibilities should be upheld, adapted or discarded. Constraints are not all equal. Some focus creativity and support sustainability, while others limit participation or restrict moral agency. Stewardship requires the ability to tell these apart and to make ethical decisions about which constraints to uphold, adapt, abandon.

This process is visible in emerging debates over AI governance (Jasanoff, 2016). The challenge is not simply to regulate technology. It is also to decide which limitations are necessary for safety, and which might inhibit social good. Similar tensions arise in environmental policy, healthcare ethics, and educational reform, where decisions must balance feasibility, fairness, and harm reduction. Ultimately, constraints triage is a form of ethical decision-making under uncertainty. It requires critical reflection, systems awareness, and the courage to act before all outcomes are known.

3.5.2. Futures deliberation

Stewardship also requires futures deliberation: the capacity to reflect on the kind of futures we want, fear, or hope for. This involves scenario thinking, moral imagination, and dialogue across diverse perspectives. Futures deliberation extends beyond forecasting to ask: What is preferable? For whom? And at what cost?

This is closely related to what Inayatullah (2008) and Miller (2018) describe as futures literacy – the ability to engage with plural futures as a way of expanding the present. Deliberation is both imaginative and political: it means holding multiple possibilities in mind while remaining rooted in lived realities. It is especially important in contexts where present actions have long-term implications like climate adaptation, education, urban planning. Here, the stewardship of possibility means navigating trade-offs, engaging diverse voices, and resisting simplistic solutions.

3.5.3. Value alignment

Finally, value alignment brings stewardship into action. It involves selecting possibilities – and the paths toward them – that are

consistent with shared values, human dignity, and ecological sustainability. Possibilities are not neutral: they carry embedded assumptions, priorities, and visions of what is considered good.

In this light, stewardship is not simply about choosing efficient or innovative futures, but about aligning action with ethical commitments. From institutional mission statements to grassroots organizing, this involves ongoing reflection: Does this path reflect who we are, and who we aspire to be? Value alignment links the personal and collective: it ties purpose to practice. It reminds us that possibility-making must be not only imaginative and collaborative, but just.

Taken together, Constraints Triage, Futures Deliberation and Value Alignment position possibility-making within an explicitly ethical and temporal horizon. Stewardship ensures that imagination and agency remain accountable to responsibility, care and long-term consequence. Within the broader architecture of Possibilities Literacy, this dimension anchors creative expansion in normative reflection, clarifying that not all possibilities should be pursued and that the shaping of futures must remain ethically attuned.

3.6. Possibility mindsets: orienting towards the not-yet

Beneath the competencies of Possibilities Literacy lie the deeper mindsets that orient individuals and communities toward the uncertain, the unfamiliar, and the not-yet. These mindsets are not simply attitudes, they are foundational stances that influence how people perceive, engage with, and respond to emerging possibilities. They help explain why individuals choose to notice certain opportunities, challenge certain constraints, or take certain actions over others.

3.6.1. Constraint appreciation

At the heart of possibility-making lies a paradox: limits enable freedom. The mindset of constraint appreciation embraces this paradox. It recognizes that constraints are not simply obstacles to be overcome. They are also conditions that give shape and meaning to agency, creativity, and decision-making. Cultivating this stance helps develop resilience in the face of complexity and ambiguity. It supports adaptive learning and can help buffer against the anxiety that often accompanies open-ended problem spaces.

Rather than fostering frustration, this mindset nurtures respect for the generative role of constraints – from time pressure and design briefs to cultural norms and moral boundaries. It echoes the shift articulated earlier in the paper: moving from seeing constraints as restrictive to engaging them as creative prompts (Stokes, 2006; Tromp, 2023, 2024). Constraint appreciation allows individuals to frame limitations as opportunities for focused exploration, rather than as threats to autonomy.

3.6.2. Openness to difference

In a pluralistic and rapidly changing world, openness to difference is vital to expanding one's possibility space. This mindset involves receptivity to unfamiliar ideas, worldviews and cultural imaginaries, and a willingness to see value in what initially seems strange, uncomfortable or counterintuitive. Importantly, openness to difference is not a passive acceptance: it is an active readiness to learn from others, suspend judgment, and imagine oneself otherwise. It is both a personal disposition and a social ethic.

From a sociocultural perspective, imagination and creativity are deeply shaped by exposure to diverse ways of thinking and being (see Glăveanu, 2020a; Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2017). Engaging with otherness broadens not only the pool of possible solutions, but the very assumptions underpinning what we think is possible. This mindset underlies dialogical creativity, ethical engagement, and futures literacy alike.

3.6.3. Self-authorship

Finally, self-authorship reflects the internalization of agency as a lived responsibility. It is the mindset of seeing oneself not just as a recipient of external possibilities, but as a co-creator of one's life and world. This involves developing a coherent sense of identity rooted in values, reflection, and intentional action. This mindset is essential for long-term stewardship and meaningful participation. It supports purpose-driven exploration and ethical responsibility.

Self-authorship aligns with Vygotskian views of agency as emergent and socially shaped (Vygotsky, 1978), as well as contemporary perspectives on narrative identity and design-based life planning. It reinforces the belief that individuals and groups are not only capable of imagining different futures, but of shaping them through deliberate engagement with constraints and alternatives.

Constraint Appreciation, Openness to Difference and Self-Authorship together describe the dispositional ground of Possibilities Literacy. While the preceding dimensions focus on enacted competencies, Mindsets shape how individuals and communities orient themselves toward uncertainty in the first place. This dimension undergirds the entire framework, sustaining engagement with constraints, alternatives and agency across time and context.

4. Educating for possibilities literacy

If Possibilities Literacy is a capacity, it can be nurtured. While traditional education systems excel at transmitting knowledge and assessing fixed outcomes, they often struggle to support learners in engaging creatively, ethically and collaboratively with open-ended futures. The challenge is not merely to teach students to imagine. It is to help them develop a deep literacy of possibility – an integrated capacity involving mindset, perception, creation, interaction, and ethical foresight.

The five dimensions outlined in this framework – Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets – each suggest specific directions for educational practice. Importantly, Possibilities Literacy is not a set of isolated skills. It is a networked capability. Educators must support students or employees in working with constraints, exploring alternatives, and exercising agency across all five dimensions.

4.1. Teaching perception: noticing possibilities

Education for perception involves developing learners' sensitivity to latent affordances, invisible constraints, and reframing opportunities. Rather than seeking the "right" answer, students can be guided to examine the framing of problems, question assumptions, and identify blind spots (Meadows, 2008). Practices such as analogy making, counterfactual reasoning, and system mapping help sharpen perceptual flexibility. Importantly, students must also learn to distinguish types of constraints – technical, social, ethical – and see how they shape visibility. Supporting this dimension involves cultivating cognitive and emotional openness to the uncertain, the strange, and the unfamiliar (Fredrickson, 2001).

4.2. Teaching crafting: shaping possibilities

The crafting dimension invites educators to engage students in design-based, iterative and exploratory learning. Learners benefit from environments where constraints are used generatively as prompts for innovation, not as barriers to be removed (Stokes, 2006; Tromp, 2023). Techniques like rapid prototyping, scenario sketching, and role play allow students to generate and test ideas while reflecting on limitations. Playfulness is a critical part of this process. Opportunities for pretend play, speculative design, and imaginative extrapolation help learners go beyond habitual thinking (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Ward, 2001). They also help learners

Table 2

Possibilities Literacy: Rubric for core competencies.

Dimensions	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Perception – Reframing constraints	Fails to recognize constraints or treats them as fixed; rigid perspective.	Notices some constraints but rarely reinterprets them.	Sometimes reframes constraints to see new possibilities.	Often reframes constraints in insightful ways.	Sees constraints as opportunities and reframes them creatively.
Perception – Possibility mapping	Fails to consider alternative futures or possibilities.	Identifies limited possibilities; thinking remains present-bound.	Explores a range of potential futures with some nuance.	Clearly distinguishes types of possibilities and maps alternatives.	Thinks fluidly across imagined, counterfactual, and emergent futures.
Perception – Deep inquiry	Accepts given realities without questioning them.	Occasionally asks reflective or curious questions.	Engages in inquiry that reveals assumptions.	Regularly uses questioning to provoke insight and change.	Pursues deep, transformative questions with wonder and rigor.
Crafting – Constraint navigation	Avoids tasks with constraints or gives up easily.	Attempts to address constraints but struggles to adapt.	Begins to navigate constraints with persistence.	Uses constraints as a guide and adapts plans effectively.	Thrives within constraints and adapts fluidly with creativity.
Crafting – Playful generation	Shows little creativity; ideas are conventional or absent.	Occasionally generates new ideas through brainstorming.	Demonstrates creative playfulness and explores new options.	Uses imagination freely to produce novel and playful ideas.	Generates a wide range of bold, playful, and unexpected ideas.
Crafting – Iterative action	Avoids revision or learning from feedback.	Attempts iteration but changes are minimal or unfocused.	Engages in meaningful revisions based on feedback.	Uses cycles of experimentation to improve ideas.	Seamlessly integrates feedback and iteration to refine outcomes.
Engagement – Negotiating constraints	Imposes or avoids group limits; struggles with collaboration.	Sometimes engages with others to define constraints.	Participates in shared decision-making around constraints.	Helps shape inclusive and effective shared constraints.	Leads ethical and inclusive negotiation of shared limits.
Engagement – Co-creation	Resists collaborative ideation; ideas remain individual.	Contributes but rarely builds on others' ideas.	Co-develops ideas with some responsiveness to others.	Engages in rich, collaborative imagination and dialogue.	Inspires and enables emergent collective creativity.
Engagement – Participatory voice	Withholds voice or dominates conversations.	Speaks up occasionally but lacks clarity or relevance.	Expresses ideas thoughtfully and listens to others.	Advocates constructively and includes diverse voices.	Balances expression with deep inclusion and relational care.
Stewardship – Constraints triage	Ignores or defers ethical decisions about constraints.	Acknowledges ethical issues but avoids difficult choices.	Begins to evaluate and prioritize constraints responsibly.	Makes considered decisions about which constraints to apply.	Demonstrates principled, context-sensitive ethical triage.
Stewardship – Futures deliberation	Fails to consider long-term or collective impacts.	Occasionally discusses future outcomes or impacts.	Explores plausible futures with some ethical awareness.	Builds thoughtful scenarios of preferable and just futures.	Leads inclusive, pluralistic reflection on complex futures.
Stewardship – Value alignment	Acts without regard for sustainability or shared values.	Inconsistently aligns actions with ethical or collective goals.	Considers shared values when planning and acting.	Demonstrates clear alignment between values and decisions.	Embeds sustainability and dignity into all choices.
Mindsets – Constraint appreciation	Views constraints only as obstacles or limits.	Acknowledges constraints but often sees them negatively.	Shows emerging understanding of their positive role.	Frequently appreciates constraints as enablers.	Deeply values constraints as essential to meaning and agency.
Mindsets – Openness to difference	Dismisses unfamiliar perspectives or ideas.	Listens to difference but often defaults to own view.	Engages respectfully with new perspectives.	Seeks out and learns from diverse viewpoints.	Embraces difference as a source of growth and possibility.
Mindsets – Self-authorship	Relies heavily on external direction or avoids responsibility.	Begins to explore personal voice and responsibility.	Shows growing agency and intentional life choices.	Acts with self-direction and evolving inner purpose.	Fully embodies authorship in shaping life and contributions.

explore new directions unconstrained by immediate practicality.

4.3. Teaching engagement: co-creating possibilities

Possibility-making is inherently social. Educating for engagement means developing students' capacity to co-create, negotiate constraints, and assert their voice in collective settings. This includes not only collaboration but also reflection on power, participation, and inclusion (Foucault, 1995; Glăveanu, 2020a). Practices such as dialogical learning, participatory design, and story circles support distributed imagination and relational autonomy. Equally important is helping learners recognize how social norms, institutional structures, and interpersonal dynamics shape whose possibilities are taken seriously.

4.4. Teaching stewardship: caring for possibilities

Stewardship is about guiding possibility ethically, a capacity that education often overlooks in practice. Students should be supported in developing their moral imagination, engaging in futures deliberation, and practicing value alignment in real-world contexts (Appadurai, 2013; Jasanoff, 2016). Teaching stewardship involves using tools such as scenario planning, backcasting, and ethics simulations, where learners weigh competing values and consider intergenerational impacts. It also means encouraging critical reflection on constraints: which limits should be preserved, adapted, or dismantled?

4.5. Teaching mindsets: orienting the learner

Last but not least, the development of Possibilities Literacy rests on shaping learner mindsets. This includes nurturing a positive relationship to constraints and an openness to difference. It also includes fostering a sense of self-authorship – the belief that one is an active agent in shaping the world. These dispositions emerge through pedagogical relationships, not just curriculum content. Educators model how to hold uncertainty, how to listen across difference, and how to stay with ambiguity. They also help students develop narratives of identity that position them as responsible co-creators of possibility.

In sum, educating for Possibilities Literacy is not about adding one more "skill" to the curriculum. It is about cultivating the conditions, practices, and relationships that support learners in seeing and shaping what could be. A suggested rubric that could help educators is offered in Table 2.

In practice, the rubric can be applied formatively by educators, facilitators, or learners themselves. It can be used to reflect on how the fifteen competencies manifest within specific activities, projects, or learning environments. Rather than assessing mastery of fixed outcomes, the rubric supports noticing developmental trajectories. It helps track how learners become more attentive to constraints, more generative with alternatives, and more agentic in shaping possibilities over time. This shift emphasises growth, openness, and adaptability rather than predetermined proficiency.

While the rubric presented here is conceptual, it offers a foundation for future empirical work. One immediate pathway involves pilot studies in formal or informal learning contexts, examining how educators use the descriptors to guide instructional design and assess growth in students' possibility-oriented competencies. Qualitative approaches could illuminate how the five dimensions manifest in practice. Examples include learner reflections, portfolio analysis, and classroom ethnography. Such approaches could also examine whether the rubric captures meaningful developmental trajectories. Quantitative studies might explore inter-rater reliability, the coherence of dimensions, or correlations with related constructs such as creativity, futures thinking, or agency. Such work would strengthen the rubric's validity and support its refinement as a practical tool for research and pedagogy.

5. Applications of possibilities literacy

Possibilities Literacy is not confined to abstract theory, it is a practical framework for navigating real-world complexity. From education and innovation to policymaking, community action, and personal development, working meaningfully with possibility is increasingly essential.

In *education*, Possibilities Literacy reorients learning from the mastery of established knowledge toward the development of capacities for noticing, generating, and guiding the new. It supports pedagogical practices that frame constraints as learning opportunities and position students as agents of their own futures, not just recipients of predetermined pathways. Possibilities Literacy thus contributes to cultivating creativity. It also supports curiosity, resilience, and ethical discernment. These skills are foundational for navigating an uncertain world.

In the realm of *innovation and design*, the framework offers a way to balance divergent thinking with responsible decision-making. Rather than valorizing novelty for its own sake, Possibilities Literacy emphasizes constraint navigation, value alignment, and futures deliberation. It supports creative processes that are imaginative, context-sensitive, and socially attuned. It encourages designers and entrepreneurs to ask what should be developed, not just what can be.

For *policy and systems change*, Possibilities Literacy foregrounds the importance of ethical reflection, pluralism, and co-creation. It encourages stakeholders to interrogate dominant narratives, explore alternative futures, and remain attuned to whose voices are heard and whose constraints are made invisible. This is particularly relevant in areas like climate adaptation, healthcare and urban planning, where decisions must balance feasibility with justice, and long-term impacts with urgent needs.

In *community development and grassroots action*, the framework helps mobilize collective imagination and relational agency. It supports practices that center participatory voice, empower marginalized groups and navigate systemic constraints through bottom-up

innovation. Whether through local food initiatives, mutual aid networks, or social movements, Possibilities Literacy underpins the capacity to reimagine the present and enact alternatives.

At a *personal level*, individuals must often grapple with the ambiguity of their own lives, especially during moments of disruption, transition, or loss. Possibilities Literacy provides tools for working through such uncertainty with imagination, reflection, and integrity. By cultivating constraint appreciation and self-authorship, people can learn to reframe perceived limits and reclaim agency over the trajectory of their lives (Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015).

Across these domains, Possibilities Literacy is not just a set of skills. It is a way of seeing, feeling, and acting in relation to the not-yet. It equips individuals, groups and communities to engage with complexity, resist closure and shape futures that are possible and just. The following section offers a concrete case that illustrates how these principles can be enacted in education.

6. Illustrative case: cultivating possibilities literacy through school-based workshops

To demonstrate how Possibilities Literacy can be enacted in practice, we introduce a brief case example drawn from a series of school-based “Possibility Making Workshops” developed and facilitated by the third author, together with the first author and a larger volunteer team, in a primary school in North Dublin. These workshops are delivered across the academic year. They are explicitly designed to cultivate the five dimensions of Possibilities Literacy – Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets – through embodied, material, and collaborative activity. The pedagogical design draws inspiration from research on possibility thinking (see Craft, 2000; Chappell, Craft, Burnard & Cremin, 2008) as well as creativity, craft, design, and technology studies. This work highlights the importance of “what if?” and “as if” orientations in children’s learning. The design also aligns with sociocultural approaches that view creativity as distributed, relational, and situated.

The workshop series aims to introduce students to a wide range of materials (e.g., fabric, paper, cardboard, yarn, foam) and practices (e.g., weaving, sewing, knotting, printing, prototyping). Each session focuses on a specific medium while inviting learners to explore its affordances, reframe constraints, and iteratively shape new possibilities. Below, we summarise how key activities exemplify the framework and implement Possibility Literacy in a school context.

6.1. Perception: reframing constraints and noticing affordances

We opened the series with “party hat game” exemplifying how playful, low-threshold activities can cultivate perception-oriented competencies. Students stood in circles and were invited to silently demonstrate a new use for an ordinary paper party hat, passing it along so each peer had to generate a different affordance. This activity supports reframing constraints (“This is not just a party hat”) and noticing latent possibilities. It also resonates with research showing the importance of cueing learners to attend to alternative uses of the familiar (e.g., Podolefsky, Moore & Perkins, 2013).

Students quickly moved beyond conventional functions such as drinking or scooping. They proposed masks, animal snouts, spinning tops, megaphones, and miniature drums, to name only a few ideas. In Possibilities Literacy terms, they were practicing possibility mapping, distinguishing among plausible, playful, and emergent alternatives. The silent format emphasised perceptual sensitivity and memory, requiring attention to what others had already done and encouraging learners to expand the collective possibility space.

6.2. Crafting: material exploration, playfulness, and iteration

Across later sessions, students were asked to engage in hands-on making that foregrounded generative action and iterative refinement. The Halloween fabric lights session, for instance, invited children to construct decorative garlands using felt, fabric, and fairy lights. Templates provided focusing constraints, while optional embellishments created room for divergence. Students learned that fabric can be used structurally and ornamentally, and that small difference in materials (e.g., woven or knitted materials) can critically alter possible uses.

In the notebook-making and embroidery session, crafting was anchored in constraints (fixed spine structure, limited stitch types) but expanded through experimentation with different techniques and thread colour. As in research on possibility thinking and material exploration (Burnard et al., 2006), constraints acted as both boundaries and catalysts. Students were encouraged to adapt their designs when mistakes occurred, embodying the logic of iterative action central to the Crafting dimension.

6.3. Engagement: co-creation, negotiating constraints, and participatory voice

All sessions in the series were structured around collaborative work at shared tables. They included “maker stations”, where more complex operations (e.g., hole punching the spine, making templates, assembling looms) were completed with adult assistance. Students constantly adopted new roles, divided tasks, and learned to manage interpersonal constraints (e.g., sequencing, materials availability). These dynamics fostered the Engagement dimension: negotiating constraints in social interaction, co-creating patterns or collective outputs, and supporting one another’s projects through verbal and nonverbal contributions.

A culminating mosaic/pixel-art mural is planned, crystallizing these relational aspects. Students collectively select a motif, colour individual pieces, and collaboratively assemble them into a unified image. Here, participatory voice and distributed imagination are central: no single student can envision the final result alone, yet each contribution shapes the emerging whole.

6.4. Stewardship: values, care, and responsible possibility-making

Stewardship emerged most clearly in discussions around material use, waste reduction, and the long-term impact of their creations. In sessions using fabric, yarn, or cardboard, facilitators emphasised sustainable sourcing (e.g., cereal boxes, scrap fabric). They also introduced the cultural histories of techniques such as weaving and printing. Students debated whether certain designs were too fragile, or whether producing an object for display entailed responsibilities toward peers or the school community.

These reflections exemplify constraints triage – deciding which limitations matter (durability, fairness, sustainability) – and value alignment, linking design decisions with collective commitments (e.g., keeping mess manageable, sharing tools respectfully). Even brief, age-appropriate conversations demonstrated how ethical foresight can be nurtured early and embedded directly in making practices.

6.5. Mindsets: openness, confidence, and self-authorship

Over time, students displayed increasing confidence in navigating uncertainty, adopting a stance of curiosity and experimentation characteristic of the Mindsets dimension. Many repeated patterns at home, adapted templates to their own purposes, or invented new designs that departed from the initial instructions. These acts reflect self-authorship or the belief that one is capable of shaping meaningful possibilities within and beyond the workshop. They also embody openness to difference, as learners regularly encountered unfamiliar materials and techniques and integrated them into their repertoires.

Across the workshop series, each session was intentionally designed to culminate in a tangible object that students could bring home. This emphasis on producing a material outcome served both motivational and developmental functions: the concrete artefacts supported a sense of accomplishment, strengthened confidence in their own making abilities, and reinforced the experience of self-authorship central to Possibilities Literacy.

At the same time, all workshops were structured to balance strong scaffolding with open-ended exploration. Activities were kept deliberately accessible, with clear steps and guidance for learners who required more support in developing agency. Yet within these supportive structures, ample room was preserved for personal variation, experimentation, and reinterpretation of the task. This dual commitment – to guidance and to freedom – ensured that students with diverse needs could participate meaningfully. At the same time, students experienced themselves as capable creators who could shape possibilities according to their own intentions.

In summary, the workshop activities offer a concrete illustration of how the five dimensions of Possibilities Literacy operate in practice. Perception is cultivated through activities that invite learners to reframe everyday materials and notice latent affordances, directly enacting competencies such as reframing constraints and possibility mapping. Crafting is foregrounded in the iterative, material-based making processes, where playful generation and iterative action are supported by deliberately framed constraints. Engagement becomes visible in the collaborative organization of work, the negotiation of shared limits, and the emergence of participatory voice within collective projects. Stewardship is enacted through age-appropriate deliberation about material use, durability, sustainability, and shared responsibility, linking design decisions to value alignment and ethical care. Finally, the Mindsets dimension underpins the entire series, as learners develop constraint appreciation, openness to difference, and a growing sense of self-authorship. Read together, these elements demonstrate how the framework's dimensions, orientations, and competencies (see [Table 1](#)) can be meaningfully integrated within everyday educational practice.

To make this alignment explicit, several activities can be directly mapped onto specific rubric descriptors (see [Table 2](#)). For example, the party hat exercise exemplifies *Perception – Reframing constraints* at a “Good” or “Very Good” level, as students move beyond conventional uses and creatively reinterpret a fixed object. The notebook-making and embroidery session illustrates *Crafting – Iterative action*, particularly at the “Good” level, when learners revise designs in response to material constraints and feedback. The planned collaborative mosaic activity reflects *Engagement – Co-creation* at “Very Good”, as students build collectively toward an emergent whole. Finally, discussions around sustainable sourcing and durability demonstrate *Stewardship – Value alignment* at a “Good” or “Very Good” level, especially when students link design decisions to shared ethical commitments. Such explicit mapping clarifies how the rubric can guide both instructional design and formative reflection in practice.

7. Final thoughts: rethinking literacy through the lens of possibilities

Literacy has long been understood as a foundation for participation in cultural, political, and economic life. Reading and writing do more than convey information – they shape what people are able to see, imagine, and do. In this spirit, Possibilities Literacy expands the concept of literacy. It encompasses our capacity to engage with what is not yet real. This includes perceiving openings, generating alternatives, navigating constraints, and shaping more hopeful and just futures.

It is important to note that Possibilities Literacy can be understood alongside several established frameworks, such as Futures Literacy, design thinking, and 21st-century skills. Each has advanced important ways of preparing learners for complexity and change. These approaches offer valuable foundations: from cultivating anticipatory awareness to fostering iterative problem-solving and to emphasising collaboration and creativity. The present framework is offered as a complementary and integrative contribution within this broader landscape. Rather than replacing existing approaches, it brings them into dialogue by highlighting how diverse competencies converge in the lived practice of engaging with the possible.

While Possibilities Literacy is presented as a conceptual framework, its primary audience is educators, managers, and scholars working at the intersection of creativity, futures thinking and educational design, particularly those concerned with how learners develop thinking skills for navigating uncertainty. It speaks directly to educators and curriculum designers, particularly in higher

education and lifelong learning. These audiences often seek to cultivate imagination, agency and ethical judgment rather than content mastery alone. The framework is also addressed to researchers in creativity, futures studies and education, offering a shared conceptual language to support theoretical dialogue and empirical inquiry. Finally, it may be relevant to practitioners and policymakers involved in innovation and systems change as a reflective lens for navigating constraints, alternatives, and collective futures.

The argument at the heart of this paper is simple but radical: in a complex and uncertain world, our survival and flourishing depend not only on knowing what is, but on becoming literate in what could be. This is not a solitary task. Possibilities are not made in isolation but in relation to others, systems and shared worldviews. Becoming literate in possibility means learning to participate in the co-creation of futures with imagination, responsibility, and care.

To illustrate what such a reorientation might look like in practice, consider a learning environment in which students or employees work with open-ended projects framed around exploring “what else is possible” within a given theme. At the learner level, this shifts emphasis from correct answers to noticing alternatives, trying out speculative directions, and articulating emerging values. At the educator level, it involves designing tasks that foreground uncertainty and dialogue rather than mastery of predetermined outcomes. At the institutional level, it implies recognising growth in possibility-oriented competencies as legitimate markers of learning alongside conventional academic performance.

The framework presented here outlines five interconnected dimensions of Possibilities Literacy: Perception, Crafting, Engagement, Stewardship, and Mindsets. Each dimension is animated by different expressions of working with constraints, exploring alternatives, and exercising agency. Together, they illuminate what it means to be a reader and writer of possibility spaces, capable of moving between recognition and imagination, between creation and discernment.

Rethinking literacy in this way calls for changes at multiple levels. In education, learners can be supported in becoming authors of meaningful futures. In policy and systems, collective constraints and possibilities must be debated ethically and transparently. In everyday life, people must reinvent their paths in response to change, loss, and hope.

Ultimately, Possibilities Literacy is not a fixed toolkit or a singular skill. It is a capacity in motion, a way of seeing and being that enables individuals, groups and communities to respond creatively, ethically and collectively to the unknown. In cultivating it, we do more than prepare for the future – we expand the space of what the future can be.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Vlad Glăveanu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Catrinel Tromp:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Constance de Saint Laurent:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization.

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