

Penser Global

Mutation et complexité des sociétés : agir vers le futur



EDUCATING FOR A GLOBAL, COMPLEX WORLD

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It's increasingly obvious that educational systems all over the world are in crisis. The message is becoming louder and clearer. Sir Ken Robinson's youtube video, "Do schools kill creativity?" has been viewed more than 6M times. In the USA, which treasured its universities and its graduate education above all, the situation is also quite dramatic. 50% of students who start a Ph.D. cannot finish it. The ones that do, take on average up to 10 years to complete it. Research by Barbara Lovitts has shown that the central reason for this failure is that our schools educate us to be good "course-takers." They do not prepare us to be independent researchers, let alone original thinkers. And the official definition of a doctoral dissertation is an *original* contribution to one's field, after all.

Our educational systems, originating as they do in the industrial machine ages, do not prepare us to be creative. On the contrary! They are designed to eliminate creativity, because their original purpose was to create classes of workers educated in such a way that they could fit into existing bureaucratic and industrial systems. This is what I call Reproductive Education. It reproduces the existing system's culture and power dynamics, and the student's job is to reproduce what the instructor tells her. Any deviation is by definition wrong, because the answers to all the questions are already known by the instructor.

Alternative education, and I speak mostly of the US, has defined itself in opposition to traditional reproductive education. In the process, it has valued subjectivity, feelings, collaboration, personal experience, and all those aspects Reproductive Education rejected.

In the process, by throwing out the baby of scholarship with the bathwater of conformity, it became what I call Narcissistic Education, too much “eveiller,” not enough “informer.”

Debates in the US now focus on the role of technology, the desire to arm every student with a social media, on the importance of returning to the “basics,” or preparing students for jobs in industry. This is all short-term thinking.

Education today requires the cultivation of complex creativity, bringing together what has traditionally been torn asunder by the disjunctive western paradigm. This means not a creativity reduced to brainstorming and lateral thinking, but the cultivation of the capacity to respond creatively to the challenges of a transitional time such as ours. It means becoming aware of our history, of what brought us here, of the reductive, disjunctive machine paradigm that is dying, and the development, both personally and collectively of a new relational, creative complexity that may take us through this period of transition towards transformation.

I reflect on two transdisciplinary graduate programs I had the pleasure of designing, an MA and a Ph.D., based on the centrality of complexity and creativity. I discuss the design of the curricula and the challenges with graduate students who have spent their entire lives in “Reproductive” educational systems, and addressing the challenges of teaching and applying creativity, complexity, and transdisciplinarity.