

The future of education...or the second Enlightenment Project

If we are evaluating the current fuss within the academic arenas and connected organizations and conferences, if we are studying the agendas of the vast amount of committees, as well as the written article and books addressing necessary changes within the academic environment, we can come up with a very impressive list of topics, which needs to be considered in order to prepare our educational systems for the next decades.

My own list of urgent topics, which I consider on a daily base to make decisions, is impressive enough that I want to share it here:

From text to media literacy, multiple expertise, cross-disciplinary, design expertise, customized learning, flexible environments to support individual timing, the new roles of faculty, knowledge management, team spirit and collaboration, management and leadership skills, global and international education, new programs and links with the professional world, the need for the supporting spaces and the technology which can help us to make many of these things happens.

The second Enlightenment Project

Some of these topics are indicators for paradigm shifts, which will revolutionize our educational system and challenge us for decades. For instance under the umbrella media literacy we subsume one most radical changes within science and academia. Science and the connected academic world was pure text driven, where images had been a suspicious entity and if, only used as decorum and in the meanwhile the technology driven use of text, images, moving images and sound within the entire world, as well as academia could give us the idea that the “Project of Enlightenment” is going in its second phase. (1)

Is the second enlightenment project an emerging from our self-imposed immaturity using images, moving images and sound because of the exclusive domination of text? As the first project which was the emerging from the self-imposed immaturity using text and the connected transcendental freedom, the absence of natural necessity in human action? Or is it the intrinsic enlightenment, since sound and images are easier and to produce and easy to distribution. Imagine how difficult it is even for authority political systems to prevent communication and access to the web. Because the internet as a tool for communication is also a vehicle for mass communication and political participation on a scale exceeding anything our governments have yet been able to achieve.

But within such a comparison we should also be reminded that there are a lot of doubts that the first Enlightenment project was very successful, especially if we look at the disasters of the 20th century. Nobody could have imagined that such a revival of the irrational behavior of the man could have happened.

And media literacy, especially image literacy is a far more loaded topic as the western history shows: for instance the iconoclasm (2) of the Protestant Reformation tells a story: images had been very often seen as powerful and connected with aspects of our being far more difficult to control. Images signify the world different then words, they are a more basic abstraction and our ability to produce images are generally not or very poor developed, because we are not educated to do so.

Our cognitive structure to handle images lies within our mythological driven consciousness. If we look into current cognitive science discussion then the humans progressed from other primates by developing gestural, linguistic, and written storage

and thought structures, thereby developing what Merlin Donald (3) calls "mimetic," "mythic," and "theoretic" cultures.

The theoretic culture, the text based culture, follows the mythic, the image culture. If we understand this development we will also comprehend the exclusive claim of the text based science and academic culture to be the only culture, which can handle truth.

Some of these arguments will help to understand that the task of image and media literacy is a difficult and complex enterprise.

What currently happens is that we educate students and faculty in the use of software, in their technical ability to manipulate images. But what it actually does it gives the amateurs the ability to present their immaturity in using images, sounds and motion, seen in thousands of power point and interactive CD-Rom or video's every day. We can make the same argument regarding writing, it is true, there was never as much written in the history as it is now, but the difference is that we have a relatively developed educational system to teach the people reading and writing, and we have nothing comparable regarding sound, images and video. We would have even not enough experts if we would start the biggest systematic and strategic program today.

Project based learning in interdisciplinary teams

But are there any possible solutions to start with programs, which educate people using images and sound, and how can we facilitate them?

First, we have to bring the experts to the table. Look at your campus and you will find them and integrate these image experts into your teams, integrate the designers and artists into the scientific projects. For decades they had been a luxury to keep and support at Universities, but now they are more needed then ever.

Create interdisciplinary teams so that team members can learn from each other and can enhance the quality of our rich media products. Because not everybody can be a dual expert, not everybody has the condition; therefore interdisciplinary teams between artists, designers, engineers and scientists are the best soil for new thinking, learning and educational programming and to build dual expertise. I believe that the new Renaissance person knows how to facilitate a team to solve a problem holistically.

Project based learning; where the various members of the project team share their talents, their, expertise and knowledge is a key for the future and it also gives the people the interdisciplinary thinking an education because they have to practice understanding the various languages and concepts developed in the various departments and disciplines.

The future classrooms cannot be tied to 4 walls anymore and the class maids are not the students who want to be or think alike.

The frame of the meeting time cannot be set to a certain hour at a day or in a week, and interdisciplinary team members can even come from another continent.

What will facilitate that is the new technology. We can be connected day and night with our peers and team members:

Wireless access to the web, e-learning platforms, wikis and instant messaging, skypeing and video conferencing allow us to link up with my team members around the globe, allow us to work cross environmental, cross disciplinary and cross cultural as well as cross continental.

This technology is there, most of the students who are attending Universities are already proficient when they attend, and the cooperate world expects that new hires are savvy and educated to behave in that way.

We need to include these aspects in our planning and designs of academic programs.

I did generate and facilitate recently such a project between faculty and students from Case and the Cleveland Institute of Art to generate video games, we brought engineers and design and arts students, as well as students from the music school together. The outcome was amazing and even top designers and executives from Electronic Art, who joined the final critique through video conferencing, had been amazed by the outcome. Their response was clear: this is the future of education and the quality of talent we need. A few of the students working in this team got afterwards offers to be interviewed for a job.

A bounder less world, but what is missing are the insights, the concepts and the guts by the people responsible to generate such learning environments, which would allow us to be focused on knowledge to action.

At first we need faculty who have the ability to understand that the new role is different and includes coaching such teams, faculty who are engaged to create these interdisciplinary, cross-environmental and even cross continental projects, teams.

We have to look for academic staff which understands that these are the key concepts for the future and we have to hire University executives and Presidents who can conceptualize and support these changes but therefore we have to reform the University boards at first as it seems.

What happens today happens mainly sporadic, not systematic because in the most cases there is no support from the top leadership.

Without these radical new programs, the academic institutions and programs of the western world will be outdated and a Museums of Education. We already have it in the Industry and we are on the edge in education too, because the future of education is happening in the developing world.

Is the academic future happening in the developing world?

Countries like China and India, as well as in many places in Latin America higher educational is accelerating fast because don't have the problem with a conservative preventing and defending University system.

In the most cases they can create from scratch driven by a high students population driven by an army of candidates, which wants to access the higher education system. Many of them already have elite institutions, which are getting already high funding by multinationals, even if some scandals occur like recently in the private sector like in India. But we should have no doubts, because of the huge market, for instance China is engaged in the biggest University expansion in history, the Chinese are

determined to create a super-league of universities to rival the best in the world, quality will follow. In the beginning they copy, that is a natural way to learn, they copy, what they extensively studied in Europe and North America. In many Universities a third of the faculty have American and European doctorates, they will reform the educational systems in a speed of light, because these countries have the technology, the ambition, the knowledge what gets done in the west, but they have growing resources and the quantity to launch successful experiments.

We saw the same happening in the car, the machinery and the electronic consumer industry over the past thirty years, I still remember seeing the Japanese visitors laying underneath each machine and copying each device. We laughed about the first cars and the clones they brought to the market, but now they are the number ones in the car industry. America doesn't produce consumer electronics anymore, and the next round will be intellectual property.

If we don't start using our competitive advantage now and redesign our educational systems immediately, we will see the same situation in the academic environment in the next decades. The developing world will dominate the educational market. I recently took a new assignment as the Chief Academic Officer at CEDIM, a private Art and Design School in San Pedro, Monterrey Mexico. I was recruited to design an international educational system more or less from scratch. I have a team of international people surround me who is highly flexible, educated and keen to create something exceptional, including an ambitious CEO. We have a fast growing student body and resources and we are in the stage of planning a new campus, which will open in fall 2007. We have a vision to create one of the top world design schools within in the next decade inventing new educational designs to facilitate future education and to use it as a competitive advantage. But in order to find such an environment I had to move to the so-called developing world.

(1) As a reminder, the Enlightenment project originated in 18th-century movement focused on the ideals of good sense, benevolence, and a belief in liberty, justice, and equality as the natural rights of man. Emanuel Kant as one of the main representatives of this historical project wrote: *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another.*

(2) Iconoclasm is the destruction of religious icons and other symbols or monuments, usually for religious or political motives. In Christian circles, iconoclasm has generally been motivated by a literal interpretation of the second of the ten commandments, which forbids the making and worshipping of "graven images". It has sometimes been motivated by christological or even political concerns as well.

(3) in Merlin Donalds: *Origins of the Modern Mind* and *A Mind So Rare*