

New Educational Settings / New Learning Teams

Eulalia Bosch

I begin writing this article while contemplating the fact that it will be published on the Internet, and so I intend to be brief. Reading on the screen imposes a series of conditions in the same way that reading the great novels of the end of the nineteenth century did. In order to do it, I will aim to try to keep the most incomparable brevity that I know at the fore: *Call me Ishmael*, the sentence with which *Moby Dick* is begun and which posits the perfection of the great mystery of universal literature: the power of fiction to explain certain truths.

In fact, the motive behind this article is also universal, and has to do with the creation and transmission of knowledge carried out by means of the new forms of access to it that the modern world has begun to demand as of some time ago.

For a variety of reasons and in different places around the world, centers of education have experienced long endogamic periods; that is to say, periods which were characterized by a generalized certainty that they were self-sufficient in and unto themselves for the transmission of knowledge. This belief, like any other, has had a self-perpetuating tendency which, at the present, brings more problems than it solves.

Schools, high schools and universities are neither the only centers of education in existence, nor is the relationship between teachers and students the only channel for the transmission of knowledge. In fact, it has always been this way, but the supremacy acquired by the processes of schooling has frequently marginalized the relevancy of other educational mechanisms, as potent as they may be. Obligatory schooling for everyone has required so many efforts – and even still, it hasn't been achieved in all countries of the world – that sometimes it has all but rendered invisible other forms of transmission of knowledge which are totally new or which, on the contrary, are deeply rooted in tradition.

It is not my intention to present a history of this phenomenon, but rather only to highlight two recent moments which, in my estimation, presage a highly interesting future panorama.

The first is constituted by the ever-more unquestionable presence of the city and the resources of its cultural and artistic heritage as essential elements of reference for any form of regulated schooling. The second is the challenge of technology and its irrefutable educational potential.

In the 1970s, we discovered the importance of that which is local in order to think globally. Today, the access to information that the Internet facilitates has put detailed information and communications mechanisms, which two decades ago were simply unthinkable, within the reach of millions. Along with this comes the paradox that that which is global sometimes is, or seems to be, even closer than that which is strictly local.

From the educational perspective, confronting this change in register is, at the same time, both complicated and extraordinarily attractive. Complicated because it obliges us to revise and transform not only professional models of behavior, but also ways to interpret reality – ways which for teachers have changed substantially while, for students recently incorporated into schools, they represent the only known reality.

Extraordinarily attractive because confronting change today is an activity of such magnitude that it implies revising the very meaning of the structural elements upon which education is based: educational spaces, along with the corresponding conception of time which they entail, and the role of the various subjects present in the process of the transmission of knowledge.

When the protective walls of schools were assaulted first by collections of slides and then later by video projectors, the school community reacted, including in its habitual activities visits to museums, cinemas, theaters and auditoriums. With the Internet this same protective wall, by now slightly less rigid, received a very high impact: the world began to enter the classroom in real time. However, simultaneously, and also in real time, it

began to allow external participants, no matter how far away, to become collaborators in strictly school-related activities.

The combination of these processes is having quite an extraordinary effect: space and time of education have expanded without limits, and this expansion makes visible the educational responsibility of institutions and people who, until now, remained sheltered by the reduction of education to the mere regulated processes of schooling.

This diversity of educational places combines and recombines in a thousand ways, creating learning communities which are completely new: teachers and students in front of the same screen sharing a common line of inquiry, adults and young people intertwining the knowledge accumulated by some and the technical skills brought by others, students of different levels sharing interests and understanding.

We find ourselves, then, facing a new point of departure which also has a significant multiplying effect. No longer is it the schools, high schools and universities that have to revise their procedures but rather the urban centers of cultural and artistic heritage are being forced to recognize their educational obligations with the citizenry, lending them a visibility which tends to have the effect of doing away with many well-known forms of excessive elitist secretism.

On the other hand, the articulation of different forms of knowledge is facilitating the emergence of work teams unheard of in the past: professionals and very young students may work together on projects that affect them simultaneously, to the degree that the instruments of communication between them allow for a continuous monitoring of purposes and initiatives. Work and education become intertwined in such a way that certain forms of work-related cooperation emerge as possibilities – even desirable ones – by current production and market-based mechanisms.

All of this leads us to think about a concept of learning which is at once very new and yet has deep traditional roots: the trade unionist-like structure of masters and apprentices still echoes among teams of professionals and children collaborating on the conception of urban reforms or on new constructions destined for very small children, (www.playce.org) in the same way that the opening up of urban cultural centers to the imaginative capabilities of children (www.lapedreraeducacio.org) upsets the ancient rigidity of masters faithful to their repetitive routines.

One good example of this new educational panorama is constituted by the article *Immersion in School Design – Educational Outcomes of an Innovative Design Studio*, included in this very same edition of **Analytic Teaching**.

Call me Ishmael was the quote with which this reflection was begun. Laurie Anderson, who read the pages of Melville like nobody else, wrote: *John Lilly¹ / The guy who says he can talk / To dolphins / Said he was in an aquarium / And there was this big whale / Swimming around and around in his tank / And the whale kept asking him questions / Telepathically / And one of the questions the whale kept asking him was: Do all oceans have walls?*

Why do we so often put limits on education? Are we frightened by freedom, perhaps? Today we have at our disposal extraordinarily sophisticated mechanisms of information and communication, to lift many of the spatial and temporal barriers with which we had previously kept knowledge contained. But we must not forget that one of the most powerful instruments for liberating and enriching the transmission of knowledge are still the questions of millions of John Lillys scattered throughout the world. “Miss, do you really believe everything that you tell us?” inquired a six-year old girl to her teacher.

Translated by Melissa Wallace

Address correspondance to:

Eulalia Bosch
Barcelona, March 2008
www.gaolletres.net

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¹ Translator’s note: The John Lilly referred to by the author has two “L”s in his last name. The translated version carries the correct spelling.