
As Per Usual, Creative Learning Approaches are Pushed to the Side

THIS TIME IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

WRITTEN BY

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Creativity is essential to the climate movement, yet technocentric approaches seem to be the most valued in Western education systems. When looking at climate change solutions, the burden is often placed on engineers, scientists and policymakers. Although there is some discussion around innovation in the energy sector and, more recently, alternatives to plastic, the focus tends to be about new 'products' or 'services'. As a result, there is little value placed on creative approaches to life in general. Climate solutions are not one-dimensional; we live in a multidimensional world in which holistic solutions are desperately needed. As noted in Susan K. Jacobson's piece, *Integrated science and art education for creative climate change communication*, "...the technocentric teaching approach does not engage people in reflecting upon their values or behaviours, or offer opportunities for integrating this new awareness or different perspectives into the development of new and more effective solutions."

Western education teaches its students subjects such as science, math, history and social studies, yet it does not examine our paradigm or seek to understand foreign epistemologies. This is more clearly understood by looking at the idea of epistemologies of the South. This idea aims to challenge the normalization of Eurocentric knowledge as the prominent ideology. As

Arturo Escobar points out in *Knowledges Born in the Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies...* "...we are facing modern problems for which there are no longer modern solutions." This being said, mainstream education is not the sole solution for climate change.

Understanding different ways of living beyond our current system is essential to imagine and move forward with climate change solutions. A change in values and consciousness is necessary to find solutions to climate change instead of the commonly seen adaptations or "Band-aid" solutions. It is the action of breaking down mental barriers of what "normal" means that allows people to understand and explore new realities.

In order to further demonstrate the importance of learning about different realities, ideologies and cultures, one should look at how different groups of people treat nature. The mainstream Western approach sees nature as a "resource" that must be obtained or extracted. In contrast, one can look to the Iroquois tradition of taking care of land and nature for the next seven generations. Similarly, Indigenous societies living near the Yurumanguí River in Colombia practice the ideology of "nacer, crecer, conocer" (birth, growth, and knowledge). Cultures that value nature see humans as a part of nature, not as separate to it. Typically these values are seen in Indigenous societies and are not as common in the international sphere; however, Bolivia poses an

exceptional example of understanding the value of the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. Bolivia's Rights of Nature are modelled after the Andean idea of the appreciation for the earth deity of the Pachamama. Similar to human rights, the Rights of Nature recognize nature as its own living entity that must be preserved and respected by private organizations, government and public society.

Single-discipline education does not prepare students with adequate skills to think critically, communicate and develop sustainable solutions – yet it is the most common approach in mainstream education systems. Once students transition from grade school to post-secondary education, they are separated into different faculties which may discourage the transfer of information between students from different areas of study. Transitioning to a new form of living requires knowledge, both learned and lived, about the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other socioeconomic factors. History, or the lack thereof, has demonstrated that there are voices that are constantly left out of the conversation and creating art and discussion led by vulnerable populations creates a space for people to share their perspectives and their realities.

Some educational institutions, such as Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Brown University are changing their STEM programs to STEAM programs, integrating the arts into their curriculums. Creators must be familiar with the world they are creating for. Compassion and a better understanding of people's different realities will allow more comprehensive solutions to be constructed. Creativity, seen as a soft skill, is often devalued in the job market;

however, it is acts of creative innovation that have transformed the world as we know it.

There must be greater emphasis, both in the education system and more broadly, on the abstract parts of humanity. The climate movement was created by humans with the goal of preserving itself and their environment, which includes their homes and histories. History has demonstrated that people preserve and document what they care about, with this then shaping what future generations are taught to value. The growing disconnect between people and the land they live from is causing a strain both socially and in the physical environment. Art and creative spaces led by a multitude of varying voices are essential to the climate movement. It is through storytelling, told in any medium, that allows for respect, appreciation and understanding of our humanity's place and responsibility on Earth.



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