work that lies ahead is perhaps best captured in the question posed by a 15 year old female student in her thinking log.

I wish I could still draw. When I was in grammar school I used to draw pretty decently. I love to draw in pencil and chalk. Art of all kinds intrigues me, but I also love music and painting, and carpentry and metal working, and dancing, and sewing and embroidery, and cooking.

I want to dance in my old ballet class, play my clarinet, draw thousands of pictures, really good ones, create beautiful poems and pieces of woodwork, cook and sew for my children, decorate my home, have a good marriage, be an active volunteer, go to church, be an astrophysicist, go to Mars, and understand all my questions about life.

That’s not too much to ask, is it?

**Personal Reflection:**

**Transforming Public Schooling into Community Learning**

It is my belief that as educators, we are at a critical junction with respect to our willingness to fundamentally reinvent public education. Past efforts that have focused on reform or restructuring have only made the old paradigm more efficient. Somewhere there has been a profound disconnect between school age education and life-long learning. Public education cannot serve the needs of future generations, unless the kind of mind we nurture develops our capacity to become more fully human and sees as its work, the creation of a compassionate and sustainable world that works for everyone.

Devoid of a compassionate and sustaining human context, public education cannot serve the public good. As a consequence, I believe we must transform the current paradigm of schooling, which created structures that stifled children's needs for meaning and sense-making; for reflection and complex cognition; for exploration and discovery; for risk, adventure and surprise; and for integration and connection with the natural world, into a vision of education that creates whole, healthy and vibrant learning communities that liberate the goodness and genius of all children for the world. It is, therefore, our work, to create a generative paradigm of learning that invites not only the fullness of our intellect, but the fullness of our imagination and the fullness of our spirit.

This vision is premised on several beliefs, enumerated below:

- Human beings inherently possess goodness and genius.
- Liberating the goodness and genius of children is essential to our sustainability.
- The fundamental purpose of education is not to credential vocational knowledge and skills, but to build the capacity of each learner to advance the human condition.
The current structures of schooling, grounded in false and disabling assumptions of human learning, are not capable of re-igniting the power, courage and imagination of children for the world. They are not big enough to enable children to respond to their real questions about life and they are not spiritual enough to enable children to see how they belong to the world and to one another.

In order to create a compassionate and sustainable world, a new global consciousness must become manifest and this can only come from a paradigm of generative, not prescriptive learning; it is this paradigm that grounds the design of a new story of teaching and learning. The attributes of the current culture of schooling – rapid information acquisition, disintegration of knowledge, individualism and competition – reflect our societal ambitions and predispositions. Schools, in fact, have executed the current cultural norms, values, priorities and reward structures (of most developed nations) quite well.

This ‘success’ has been at an enormous human and environmental cost, however, and the result has been the emergence of a global mind focused on capitalism, consumption, competition, acquisition and winning. The deep systemic problems that are now casting a malignant shadow over the global community, and our own society and institutions, will not be resolved until we recognize and re-connect to what we have lost.

- The acquisition of wisdom and the power of discernment.
- Compassionate use of knowledge.
- Integrative ways of knowing and sensing.
- Concern for human and community prosperity and moral action in the world.
- Commitment to ecological sustainability and the acceptance of nature as a sacred dimension of our lives.
- Willingness to engage slowly, around issues of long-term consequence.
- Deep awareness of and appreciation for our intimate relationship with and integration in the profoundly interconnected living world.
- The understanding that real learning comes slowly, through the construction of meaning, the recognition of patterns and the creation of relationships.

These attributes of a generative learning paradigm create a framework for a new epistemology, a new pedagogy and a new learning community – all of which offer the possibility to invite the creation of a new global mind – a mind capable of creating a compassionate and sustainable world that works for everyone.

At this juncture in time, we confront two life-defining challenges:

1) How to solve the deeply human problems facing us as a global civilization, problems for which our current system of education does not provide congruent context, vibrancy, practice or affirmation?

2) How to create learning conditions that liberate the goodness and genius of all children for the world?
The promise of this time in human evolution, is that by unleashing the unprecedented capacity and power of the human mind for the world, we set in motion the possibility of inventing a world that works for everyone.

All of our students are desperate to thrive. If we want our students to demonstrate understanding at higher levels of complexity and deep understanding of concepts and constructs; if we want them to engage in meaningful work, genuine research and serious inquiry; if we want to enhance their opportunities for collaboration and exploration; if we want to give them opportunities to authentically study problems of significance in a learning environment that promotes mathematical investigations and scientific inquiry (and the integration of the arts and humanities) and if we want to create a learning environment that honors who they are and how they learn, we must focus on creating the conditions that we know will more likely increase the learning capacity and power of each student.

If we don’t, I fear we will continue to develop youngsters who do not have the tools to understand the complexities and interconnections among different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, who are afraid to risk or experiment because it isn’t on the examination, who seek simplistic, narrow and expedient solutions to complex problems, and who have not developed the intellectual fluency and repertoire to become lifelong learners.

As a result, I struggle now with the need for new language to describe and new tools to measure the efficacy of the learning conditions that must be designed and implemented in order to invite our children to create new minds, minds that can imagine and feel compelled to create, a sustainable world that works for everyone.

Educators must think about the learning environments we create as analogue to a learning biosphere, an ecosystem intentionally designed to grow and nurture specific habits of mind. Most challenging in that context is the realization that growth in a living system is not quickly observable or easily quantified and that what is easily observable or quantified may not represent sustainable growth or health.

How to authentically assess the learning of integrative ways of knowing, ethical leadership, moral reasoning, problem formulation, knowledge generation and knowledge application in novel situations, for all learners, is one of the essential issues we must resolve.

Until we do so, I believe that children will continue in their state of educational somnambulism – they will be sleepwalking their way through their education, because the structures of the current system, by design mitigate against deep and reflective study, the passionate exploration of ideas, thoughtful analysis of questions and issues, genuine collaboration and serious inquiry and research and in so doing deny them genuine access to participate fully in and grapple with issues of human significance. As a result, they will emerge from this system of learning with minds, hearts and spirits unable to deeply
comprehend and make sense of the complexity and interrelatedness of the problem facing the human family.

Children are bored in places called schools, not because we ask them to do too much, but because we engage them in work that is far too small for their imagination. IMSA is seeking committed partners to work with us in creating profoundly more meaningful and spiritful ways to develop and assess deep human knowing so that all students have the habits of mind required to embrace with eagerness and confidence, whatever lies ahead— as pioneers in an unknown land.

References


