

## The Challenge with Educational Transformation: Rethinking the Mission to Educate in an Era of Change, Progress and Uncertainty

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### Abstract

The digital culture is a challenge for a sustainable future because it adopts the same values embraced by proponents of the Industrial Period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The digital culture, in the same way as the industrial culture, promote the values of consumerism, progress, change, innovation and individualism, all of which contribute to a decline in the conversations, and collaborative problem solving that comprise the pool of collective ideas and sources of intergenerational knowledge of local self-sustaining communities. In order for this conversation to begin, educators must first engage themselves in understanding the metaphors that are carried forward by words such as progress, change, innovation and individualism and the advantages of encouraging the revitalization of the local cultural commons.

*Keywords: Cultural Commons, Traditions, Consumerism*

### Introduction

Schoolteachers are busy people and schools are often hectic places. With a lack of adequate time and available resources, schools strive to offer students various learning opportunities and experiences. However, because assets are scarce, the average schoolteacher and school administration must prioritize what occurs in and outside of the classroom.

I have selected the topic of change in education as an important subject for teachers and educators to consider by way of the losses and gains inherent with an education system that advances change as an inherently progressive and positive force. I have chosen the late American educator, author, lecturer and environmental activist, Chet Bowers as an important representative for that critique. Over many decades, Bowers stressed the importance of preserving the cultural commons in an era of educational change.

One important theme to discuss was the notion of *change* in education, which Bowers believed educators had accepted as a progressive force. The second theme concerned the necessity of revitalizing what he described as the ‘cultural commons.’

Bowers argued that hyper-consumerism and conservation of the environment were important issues to discuss and the cultural commons was the obvious place to start that conversation. A revitalization of the cultural commons, he noted, should be prioritized by K-12 schools and higher education because the cultural commons acts to preserve the self-sufficiency of communities, which are in direct opposition to the individualism that is so often advanced through abstract thought and theory. Individualism is then advanced through the digital culture, which proclaims and promotes hyper-consumerism, i.e. “you deserve this”. As a result, students have a weak commitment to the common good (Van Brummelen, 2007).

The digital culture is a challenge for a sustainable future because it adopts the same values embraced by proponents of the Industrial Period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The digital culture, in the same way as the industrial culture, promote the values of consumerism, progress, change, innovation and individualism, all of which contribute to a decline in the conversations, and collaborative problem solving that comprise the pool of collective ideas and sources of intergenerational knowledge of local self-sustaining communities. In order for this conversation to begin, educators must first engage themselves in understanding the metaphors that are carried forward by words such as progress, change, innovation and individualism.

These types of words have been accepted by educators without consideration or critique and yet are metaphors which have contributed in various ways to the problems that human beings face today and into the future such as environmental degradation, loss of intergenerational knowledge, hyper-consumerism, non-monetized skills and activities, all aspects of the local cultural commons (See Bowers, 2005; 2008 and 2011).

### **The Personalization of Curriculum**

The emphasis and direction that school curriculum has taken today is that of ‘personalization.’<sup>1</sup> Personalization is a metaphor, which conveys the idea that autonomy, and the individual’s perspective and choice is always paramount. Although personalized learning has its advantages such as a relevancy of subject matter to one’s life, there are also losses with personalization. The most obvious loss is the inconsistency with public education as a social institution. Because personalization encourages an emphasis on personal autonomy, choice and the individual’s perspective, it tacitly wields against interdependent face to face relationships, the conservation of the local environment and ignores the legacy of learning from the past because the past is perceived as backward. This ideology assumes personalization is always good and encourages learners to accept an industrial-consumer-dependent lifestyle (see Bowers, 2007). When the rational individual perceives herself as the supreme source of authority, there is an over-emphasis on oneself and the individual’s perspective supersedes what is essential to living as a

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<sup>1</sup> See BC Curriculum <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/overview>

member within a community. Personalization, which encourages individualism, ignores the tacit understandings and moral commitments that work towards “a common memory, and a vision based on a balance between personal and the public good” (Van Brummelen, 2007, p. 64).

A personalized curriculum has been influenced by the elitist and political ideas of the educator and political theorist Paulo Freire and educator John Dewey who perceived *change* as transformative, linear, scientific and always positive. They adopted a binary Western way of thinking about change and progress. For example, Freire’s cultural bias led to thinking that change should be understood only as ‘binary opposites’ (e.g. oppressor –oppressed, Subject-object, action-reflection, etc.) however, binary thinking ignores diversity, complexity, context, past traditions, intergenerational knowledge, and the losses that are manifest in a culture that perceives change and progress only in linear ways (Allman, 1999).

### **The Humanities and The Commons**

The humanities, which have documented the human experience or condition with particular attention given to our diverse heritage and traditions by means of philosophy, literature, comparative religion, art, music, history and language, reflect several features of the commons. In a similar way the humanities have served their communities for thousands of years, giving us groundwork to describe where we have been and a vision for where we are going. However, both are under siege. The mid-twentieth century experienced a shift away from the humanities in educational institutions towards a more utilitarian, career oriented paradigm (see Prior, 2014). In the process, the traditional liberal arts or humanistic commons, was portrayed by some as unnecessary in a day and age of progress, innovation and technology (see Thielman, 2015). This has resulted in a shift away from the humanities to a greater focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, i.e. STEM. This is not necessarily unreasonable, especially if one is thinking of the liberal arts primarily in terms of group think and political correct ideas (see Gaposchkin, 2015); however, the humanities and the commons include the process of deep self-reflection, critique, the sharing and passing down of traditional ways of living, and about who its people are, who they want to be and how they should live in this world.

The humanities and the commons are not entirely concerned with the *content* that is taught, but rather in the method of combined learning, teaching, sharing and community problem solving. It is not simply about *what* to know, rather the humanities and the commons are about learning *how* to think, sort through ambiguity; work with inexact or incomplete information, and act in collaboration which can lead to living a good and just life (Gaposchkin, 2015).

### **The Digital Culture and The Commons**

The digital culture is interrelated with certain market orientations. One of these orientations is the advancement of consumerism. The digital culture purports itself to be the answer to many of the problems that human beings face today such as lack of knowledge, the destruction of

the environment, global communication. Yet the digital culture also encourages people to become ever more consumer driven, isolated and less reliant on one other (see Bowers, 2008). With all the benefits that the digital-consumer culture generates— and there are many, there are equally if not more disadvantages and losses. Some of these include losses related to learning particular skills and activates that incur a low carbon footprint, face to face relationships and interactions, the sharing of intergenerational knowledge, mutual support and the protection of personal privacy which the digital culture puts an end to. It is of no surprise that Bowers (2014) asks if the “loss of privacy, communication between generations, economic security, being displaced by robots and from hackers, and the loss of the diversity of cultural ways of knowing” is really worth it, even if this is all in the name of “progress”, which is an unhealthy and environmentally damaging type of commons.

Rather than learning from non-digital cultures which have survived for centuries, the digital culture of consumerism resorts to solving problems through technology, which generates more consumerism. The increasingly widespread use of computers in the classroom contributes to undermining the local cultural commons because although computers are useful—indeed, now indispensable, there are two inherent characteristics of the digital culture that have gone largely unrecognized.

First, as Bowers (2007) notes, the digital culture reinforce a pattern of thinking that is also the basis of the West’s industrial, consumer-oriented culture. There are certain patterns of thinking that demonstrate the West’s industrial, consumer-oriented mindset. These include thinking of language as a conduit in a sender/receiver process of communication. This is problematic because words have a history and are mostly metaphoric. The second is viewing the individual as constructing their own knowledge, which is through data and information accessed through a computer. The third is thinking of abstract, out-of-context data and information as being free of cultural influence. The fourth is thinking of the past and future as matter of the individual’s subjective judgments and shifting preferences; and finally viewing moral values as individually chosen. In short, the pattern of thinking reinforced through the digital culture, while being highly valuable in many areas of life, contributes to undermining the world’s diverse non-monetized cultural ways of knowing—and thus undermines the local non-monetized cultural commons. Hence, one might describe the digital culture as a type of colonizing technology (see Arnold, 2006).

The digital culture promises that scientific and technological endeavors will solve the greatest challenges we face today. Some of these challenges are social segregation, hyper-consumerism, a reduction in privacy, and alternate non-monetized relationships, which paradoxically the digital culture advances. The digital culture does not endorse a preserving of the skills and intergenerational knowledge of local communities in non-consumer ways. By understanding how hyper-consumerism and ethnocentrism are tacitly promoted by the digital culture, people may understand how the digital culture provides no alternative to its lack of ability to preserve and withstand change and shock from outside systems (Hopkins, 2008). We need the self-sustaining non-monetized local cultural for self-preservation.

Turning knowledge, relationships, skills and even the environment into commodities is not always the expression of progress (Bowers, 2011). This thinking can be traced all the way back to the ideas advanced by the Greek philosopher Plato who endorsed a progressive nature of change, which involved ethnocentric and abstract thought. In my own province of British Columbia, Canada, a newly designed competency based curriculum underscores societal change with a human centered focus assuming that ‘personalization’ of learning is the solution to the persistent challenges we face in the world. The answer is a human centered personalized education, together with a technological saturated education and the acceptance and approval of rapid societal change because all change is good.<sup>2</sup> The curriculum assumes that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century *change* is the only constant in life and that a changing world is obviously a better world. Cultural change, which the curriculum propose is inevitable, must include personalized learning to support students becoming ‘successful citizens’. A changing world requires a curriculum that will advance a scientific-technological student centered epistemology. Other epistemologies such as face-to-face storytelling and the sharing of local resources is described as ‘passive’ learning.

A scientific-technological epistemology aligns with the concept of personalization; however, this has fundamental inconsistencies between it and public education as a social institution. *Personalization*, which seems to be an obligation of the digital culture, may become just another means for social separation of races, classes, cultures and religions. Unless action is taken to reduce social segregation, and not advance it through a personalized ontology, a danger grows in the face of the many complex challenges we face in the future, which requires collective problem solving, and community solidity, not personalization. A personalized ontology leads to a culture of asking ‘*who can we blame?*’ instead of ‘*how can we solve this problem together?*’

The personalization of learning is a most common educational discourse and has its genesis in a philosophy of individualistic Enlightenment notions about human development and social progress. This is advanced through a digital consumer culture whose “basic structures and values are unthinkingly and naively accepted as leading to continuous progress and empowerment” (Van Brummelen, 2007, p. 64). The digital culture assumes other cultures as essentially backward and non-progressive requiring modernization via a model of technological growth and personalization. Understood as an inherently progressive force the metaphor of *change* ignores non-digital conservative values and practices upheld by various cultures such as those of Indigenous groups and the non-monetized traditions of the local cultural commons.

### **Dewey and Freire as Transformative Theorists**

Surely, one of the most cited and iconic figures in the contemporary education literature is Paulo Freire (1921-1997). In fact, his impact has been large enough to affect thinking in such areas as social work, communications, nursing, community development, theology, philosophy and sociology (Mayo, 2017). Another well-quoted and iconic figure in contemporary education

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<sup>2</sup> See British Columbia curriculum, <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/redesign.pdf>

is the American pragmatist John Dewey who assumed the common generative metaphors of liberalism, human self-emancipation, knowledge as power, and change as linear as taken for granted.

What Freire and Dewey had in common was a similar faith in autonomous individualism, indubitable rationality, and evolutionary progress. For example, Dewey believed that when Plato said that philosophers should be kings, “this may be best understood as a statement that rational intelligence and not habit, appetite, impulse, and emotion should regulate human affairs” (Dewey 1961, p. 263). In other words, “the former secures unity, order, and law; the latter signify multiplicity and discord, irrational fluctuations from one estate to another” (Dewey 1961, p. 263). Their ideas have disallowed a common paideia to flourish in our society since it undercuts communal authority as well as shared moral commitments” (Van Brummelen, 2007, p.63).

The theme of growth is, of course, also at the core of Dewey and Freire’s philosophy. As Western thinkers, Dewey and Freire assumed learning to occur through high status abstract knowledge and critical thinking compared with the ‘passive’ knowledge resulting from oral teachings and traditions such as those of Indigenous, religious and cultural groups. The most prominent mistake made by both Dewey and Freire— and is an error that is also evident today; was to assume that there should be one-true approach to education (see Bowers, 2005). For Dewey, it was the experimental method of inquiry while for Freire it was critical consciousness leading to the individual continually transform, rename or recreate the world (Freire, 1970). By employing abstract critical reflection, which he claimed would enable students to emancipate themselves from the control of previous generations and become free; his views represent the problems that are still apparent in public education today, that is, Western elitism and a lack of awareness of one’s own cultural and exclusive bias.

Consequently, indulging in a ‘personalized’ learning experience, students are encouraged to ignore previous generations, construct their own knowledge and assess only themselves. In arguing that knowledge could not (and should not) be transferred from one generation to the next, which is essentially epistemological prejudice, Dewey and Freire could be charged with having failed to take into account the different knowledge and value systems of the world’s diverse cultures. By doing so they took-for-granted their own Western cultural assumptions. These assumptions, which are prevalent in education today, consisted of a linear view of progress, a human-centered world, an autonomous form of individualism, and an evolutionary view of cultural development (see Bowers, 2011).

These assumptions are the basis of the West’s industrial culture. They have their own language, i.e. ‘progress’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘empowerment’. Because language is a social practice in which to participate (Kramsch, 1993) language leads to the normalizing of particular behaviors. Just consider the behaviour food choices, such as the eating patterns of highly industrialized foods, i.e. McDonalds (see Bowers, 2005). The transformational thinking of Freire and Dewey embodied a Western model of thought, which privileged abstract thinking and technology as

the answer to the world's problems. By doing so, they ignored the possibility of other cultural ways of knowing and solving problems (Bowers, 2011).

In terms of the world's problems, there are also the major world religions that guide the lives of huge numbers of people, provide the basis of people's value and knowledge systems and consequently, understand human relationships and behaviour in other ways (Tucker, 2003). The problem with Freire and Dewey is that their thinking weakened other forms of knowledge, wisdom and intergenerational renewal that are essential to resisting the spread of individualism and consumerism. (Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2005).

In the name of progressive education, educational reformers have borrowed from Dewey and Freire. This is apparent when educators argue that students should construct their own knowledge and values (see Bada, 2015). Such views contribute to a world monoculture that lacks diversity, and is both environmentally damaging and increasingly dependent upon consumerism. Ironically, Dewey and Freire used the same language to justify undermining the local cultural commons, which Western educated elites use to justify their colonizing agenda. This includes using words such as freedom, emancipation, individualism, progress, development and democracy, all metaphors derived from the Industrial Era of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (See Bowers, 2008; 2009).

In the West, the dominant view of language that influences social psychological theory and reinforced in Western universities is perceived as a conduit in a sender/receiver process of communication (Maynard & Peräkylä, 2003; Reddy, 1979). The reality is that when a person is born into a language community she/he learns to *think* in terms of the assumptions and categories that have been passed down over generations through the languaging processes of the culture and these assumptions and categories are the basis of the person's taken-for-granted experiences (See Bowers, 2007). To make the criticism more direct, the language used by transformative learning theorists such as Dewey and Freire fail to recognize the importance of the culturally diverse approaches for accepting natural systems and cultural traditions of mutual aid and community self-sufficiency. If this is true, then educators need a complex and contextual understanding of how language provides the assumptions that influence how students think about themselves, others and culture, as well as what they should ignore.

The transformative theories of Dewey and Freire are grounded in an evolutionary based pride, which can be seen in how they "understood the more culturally evolved nature of their respective one true-approach to knowledge" (Dewey, 1916, pp. 394, 396). This was also obvious in their total indifference to the possibility that we can learn anything about environmentally sustainable practices from non-Western cultures that Dewey referred to as "savages" (1916, pp. 394, 396). Similarly, Freire perceived other cultures by using a "spectator theory of knowledge" which he referred to as backward cultures and "living an existence little advanced over that of animals" (Bowers, 2007; 2008). In *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973), Freire describes the characteristics of the "backward regions of Brazil" in the following way: "men of semi-intransitive consciousness cannot apprehend problems situated outside their sphere of biological necessity. "Their interests," he continues, "center almost totally



around survival, and they lack a sense of life on a more historical plane” (p. 17). As cultures evolve beyond this near animal state of existence, they move to what he called “naïve transitivity” where they begin to respond to questions that arise from the context they live in; but their “permeable” state of existence is still limited by their tendency to rely upon polemics and magical explanations. The most evolved cultures are characterized by what Freire called a “critically transitive consciousness”—, which is the state of consciousness that he identifies himself with (Bowers, 2009). Transformative theorists are correct when they advocate unsustainable and discriminatory practices, which need to be reformed, but as previously stated, there should also be an awareness of what needs to be conserved as sources of resistance to being inhabited by the requirements of a consumer dependent Western culture.

### **Double Binds / Losses and Gains**

Western culture and education is caught in a series of double binds. For example, although technology creates many positive opportunities for learning, students also become increasingly addicted to finding their sense of community in cyberspace instead of in face-to-face, intergenerationally connected communities (see Bowers, 2011). Face-to-face communities, which have been free and publicly accessible, are becoming increasingly monetized and privately owned. This is an example of ‘enclosure’ which is the process of transforming aspects of a culture (broadly understood) such as the right to express her/his ideas freely, and are shared by members of the community into what is now privately owned turning what was once free into a commodity or service that has to be purchased (see Bowers, 2009).

I have recently experienced the enclosure of research and publication of peer reviewed articles. Retrieving an academic article was once free but these are now becoming increasingly locked behind paywalls. Academics producing peer reviewed research, now experience commercial journals and book publishers who claim copyright and charge excessive publication and subscription fees. These are sophisticated and novel ways to enclose the intellect with concepts such as ‘intellectual property rights’. Boyle (2002, p.14) refers to “the enclosure of the intangible commons of the mind” as the “new kind of enclosure movement”.

However, the academic commons have experienced more open access scholarly journals owned and controlled by academics themselves. Now academics are discovering the virtue of publishing their works online under Creative Commons licenses, making them free to everyone in perpetuity. Another example is the Open Educational Resources movement, which shares curricular materials, open textbooks and curricula and learning materials online for free. The commons offers an alternative to a private consumer dependent lifestyle. The initial challenge for educators, however, is to help students recognize the types of enclosures they have uncritically accepted and participate on a daily basis.

### **Progress**

The idea of “progress” stems from the same assumptions of the past with the autonomous individual, the Cartesian way of privileging the individual’s perspective, the assumption about



the linear nature of progress, and no limits on human freedom. This originated from the Enlightenment period, reinforced in the industrial era and again carried forth today through the digital industrial era (see Bowers, 2011). These analogs of progress do not taken into account other cultural ways of knowing especially cultures that do not assume that the individual is the primary social entity. As has been previously suggested, in Western culture, among some of the key assumptions that schools and universities share in common is thinking of change, empowerment, individualism, transformation, abstract thought and innovation as an inherently progressive force. The following example is from a Canadian university describing itself as innovative and empowering:

The world needs a daring culture of innovation and collaborative research—one that empowers students, faculty and staff to work together with communities to confront humanity’s greatest challenges and opportunities. At this university, we are uniquely positioned to act upon this need, with our leading work in water and food security, Indigenization, environmental science and engineering and in agriculture, veterinary and food sciences. Together we will change the world.<sup>3</sup>

The problem here lies in the use of words such as ‘empowering’, ‘change’ and ‘innovative’. These ideas seem to have been borrowed from the transformative theories of Dewey and Freire, which are grounded in an evolutionary based superiority, and a respective one true-approach to knowledge. Moreover, the assumption is that change is always good, that culture need altering, yet nothing is said about the threat of hyper-consumerism, or the loss of the cultural commons through enclosure. The idea of change, innovation and transformation assumes traditions are bad, the new is always good, and that transformation and change are always an inherently progressive force. Bowers (2008, p. 326) described such assumptions as embedded within a “deep seated ethnocentrism that is masked by abstract references to values cultural differences”. The key assumption here is that critical thought and Western technology will lead to overcoming the many problems we face today such as failing pseudo-communities and environmental destructive practices.

Ironically, the contradiction with combining change, science, innovation with an abstract reference to Indigenization is the lack of any mention of what should be conserved and no mention of the less consumer lifestyle of the cultural commons. There has been a failure of Western educational institutions to understand how the assumptions of ‘progress’ and ‘innovation’ has led to the destruction of the *commons*. It would seem that the *commons* would be a constraint on innovation, progress, individual self-expression and autonomy. This would lead to educational reformers such as Dewey to claim that traditions, i.e., non-scientific traditions, as “habits that enslave the individual just to the degree in which intelligence is disconnected from them”. Such ethnocentrism, which assumes progress and innovation impelled Dewey to claim, “Routine habits are unthinking habits” and thus must be continually reconstructed through the community’s reliance upon the experimental method of inquiry (1918, pp. 58-59).

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from *The Globe and Mail Canadian University Report*, 2019.

## Traditions Inside The Cultural Commons

One of the first stories shared with me at a new place of work concerned the limited money available to repair broken machinery, furniture and so forth. To purchase and replace damaged items was not an option. Instead of throwing away broken items and replacing these with new products, community insiders used their skills and knowledge to repair these objects on site. I witnessed the mutual support, patience, intergenerational sharing of knowledge and skills, and less-consumer-dependent mindset that the community had created for itself.

There are obviously good and bad versions of the cultural commons so we should not romanticize the commons. However, what we are currently losing is access to collectively produced knowledge, skills and insights that the cultural commons can offer and have provided for thousands of years. The nature of the commons varies from culture to culture, but what they share is that much of the culture's symbolic patterns as well as the natural systems of the bioregion are available to the members of the community on a non-monetary basis (See Bowers, 2009). The local traditions of knowledge sharing and patterns of mutual support that enabled communities to be relatively self-sufficient represent what is described as the cultural commons.

A key reason that the commons is so innovative and so important to preserve is that it is able to draw upon social behaviors that the mainstream economy rejects as trivial or irrelevant. In this way, they provide an alternative to the typical markets, which players are supposed to be a hard-bitten, competitive rationalist seeking to maximize their material self-interest. In a *commons*, what is valued is friendship and cooperation because it is all about social exchange and trust.

Members within the commons know what is best for them. For example, Von Hippel suggests that most innovations in scientific instruments and sports originates from users (Cohen, 2011). The commoners, in short, are co-producers and co-innovators. In a time when global markets, government are steam rolling over our communities, the commons offers a way to reassert a sense of place and re-embed markets in social community. Just think of the number of farmers markets which have increased rapidly over the past few years, and many people are rediscovering local crops and plants. The commons can also withstand "conflict where changes in the narrative then become more important for some members, and so over time, conflicts embedded within the original narrative can be challenged, such as debates over purpose, which actually confirm and illuminate the normative foundations of a commons" (Madison, Frischmann & Strandburg, 2009, p.375).

It is especially noteworthy that the word "commons" is not part of the emancipatory liberal discourse. The cultural commons are uniquely social and conserve the traditions of their culture. An example of the social nature of the cultural commons is the notion of undergraduate students participating in college commons, grounded in the classroom and reinforced by social traditions and rituals associated with communal living (Maddison, Fishburn

& Strasburg (2009). This is contrasted with a key characteristic of Freire's thinking. Freire spoke of conscientization, which is critical reflection that leads to a transforming praxis (Bowers, 2007). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1974 edition), Freire writes, "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 75). Bowers suggests that Western intellectuals identical with Freire "reject the intergenerational knowledge achieved by all the world's cultures by claiming that once named, the world in its turn reappears as a problem and requires of them a new naming. The silences here, Bowers argues, include avoiding any recognition of the traditions of different cultures that sustain their commons, which are sources of empowerment and self-sufficiency. These silences in the writings of the earlier liberal/Enlightenment thinkers led to ignoring the differences in cultural ways of knowing. In reality, it was not really a case of ignoring these differences; rather, it was a matter of viewing other cultures as primitive, uncivilized, and as heathens" (Bowers, 2013, n.p).

Now it seems to me that many students in university classes have a superficial understanding of traditions. For example, they associate traditions only with holidays and family gatherings, while also viewing traditions in general as obstacles to social progress and as a source of backwardness. What is not understood by most students of Western universities, and the general public should be included here too, is that traditions are like an iceberg with deep complex roots underneath which is not always visible (see Shils, 1981).

The cultural commons reveals the difference between reading about a ceremony in a book or from a computer screen and participating in one, as well as the difference between reading about a narrative in the abstract and participating in the culture's way of passing on and renewing its collective memories (Bowers, 2008). The argument against the present 'tradition' of using the latest technology to learn languages or complex cultures and their way of life, "helps to perpetuate the same Western biases that represented print as the basis of high-status knowledge and progress, and the dismissing of oral traditions and face to face teaching as a source of cultural backwardness and superstition" (Bowers cited in Ryder & Visnovsky, 2004, p.162). Consequently, the word tradition has a pejorative meaning for all of the proponents for change and innovation in education even though they are entirely reliant on the traditions in their use of language and most other areas of their daily lives. Sale (1995) summarizes the problems that have penetrated culture and schools:

All that 'community' implies—self-sufficiency, mutual aid, morality in the marketplace, stubborn tradition, regulation by custom, organic knowledge instead of mechanistic science—had to be steadily and systematically disrupted and displaced. All of the practices that kept the individual from being a consumer had to be done away with so that the cogs and wheels of an unfettered "machine" called the economy could operate without interference, influenced merely by the invisible hands and inevitable balances and all the rest of the benevolent free-market system (p. 18).

It was necessary to "liberate" individuals from the intergenerational knowledge of their communities which is the current tradition of total freedom and autonomy of the individual. Thus, the current goal promoted by many educational reformers for fostering autonomous

individuals through the *personalization* of learning who can construct their own knowledge turns out to be what is required by industrial, consumer values. I agree with Bowers that this is a Western Enlightenment abstraction that ignores the interdependencies and historical continuities that characterize how all individuals are nested in cultures that sustain life. The local commons stands in sharp contrast to the ethnocentrism of the promoters of Western ideas who have ignored the differences in cultural ways of knowing.

## Root Metaphors

The term *metaphor* means to “transfer or carry over” (Verbrugge & McCarrell, 1977). There are root metaphors, which underlie the West’s industrial/consumer culture and influence our way of thinking (Bowers, 2007). Root metaphors are images, narratives, or facts that shapes an individual's perception of the world and are the basic interpretative framework for understanding different aspects of cultural life. Some examples of root metaphors in the West include mechanism, innovation (the Western assumption that equates innovations with a linear form of progress, progress (thinking of change as contributing to a linear form of progress and as in opposition to traditions), empowerment, transformation, and individualism (thinking of the individual as the source of ideas, values, and as essentially free) (Bowers, 2007, p.4).

In regards to culture, the myth of progress entails thinking of cultures as evolving from a state of backwardness to being developed and modern—with the West as representative of the most evolved. This myth was a large part of the legacy of Enlightenment thinkers, which led to thinking of traditions as constraints on progress (see also Shils, 1981). Metaphors may lead to emphasizing, suppressing or reorganizing features of an event, issue, relations, function or object and are carried forward over many generations. The analogs, which are the assumptions and values of previous generations that once made sense, were established before there was an awareness of environmental limits (Bowers, 2011).

Less understood is that words have a history (Shils, 1981). When their meaning is framed by the analogs settled upon in the past, they carried forward earlier forms of cultural intelligence as well as the era’s misconceptions. Educators need to help their students recognize how the assumptions and values of previous generations within a culture are reproduced as they learn the language of their cultural group (Bowers, 2011). The oldest form of cultures that needs to be revitalized is the culture that conserves the non-monetized intergenerational knowledge, skills, and activities that enabled people to live more mutually supportive and less money dependent lives. The overriding perception is that “anything you do out of allegiance to tradition and social expectation is inauthentic and not you, because the real you is the choices you make” (Choi, 2014, par.3).

A contrast to this is the Amish and Finnish cultures of learning that encourages belonging and collective decision-making, not personal choice, happiness, material success, or self-realization. Although Finnish education has undergone recent educational reform and constructivist theories of learning are not absent from those reforms; the fact that constructivism assumes that individuals should be emancipated from the knowledge of earlier generations and this can

only be achieved as they construct their own knowledge and learn what interests them is not given primacy within the Finnish education system. Rather they include a self-limiting principle, which is not the dominant motivation in the West, which is to achieve more and do so with faster progress.

Other countries have realized the problems inherent with adopting a Western worldview that encourages individualism and autonomy as a goal for a successful life. For example, Choi (2014, par.19) suggests that in India, studies have found that even while young college students become megaconsumers, that picking clothes or music without consideration for what their parents might think is not considered particularly moral. In Japan, advertisements explicitly encourage individuals to “follow the trend” and “fit in.” Similarly, in Korea, Choi notes that advertisements now encourage that “you might be able to make a dish almost as good as your mother-in-law’s — because the ability to uphold tradition is most valued in driving personal choices, not innovation or individuality” (Choi, 2014, par.19).

## Conclusion

The challenge for this current generation of educators is to first recognize how they have been indoctrinated by ideas that ignore issues related to the diversity of the world’s cultural commons. Educators in schools, as well as those who function in other social settings, must begin to address the challenge of root metaphors, patterns of thinking and consumerist values that accompany the use of Western technologies and consumer fads, which are cultural tools, carried over from the Industrial Revolution. An educator must recognize the dominant root metaphors that underlie the West’s approach to reality, values and knowledge and how they differ from the basic assumptions of the local cultural commons.

Progressive and transformational change reformers such as Freire and Dewey drew on a tradition of thinking that emphasized a Western linear understanding of transformation— that is, progress from simple to complex, decolonization and reinhabitation. When considering the local cultural commons these two thinkers are important because schools and educational institutions have adopted—in most cases unconsciously—many of their suggestions. However, what if the ideas espoused by these thinkers were fundamentally mistaken and a mask for advancing a deep seated ethnocentrism and consumerist mindset with abstract references to valuing differences. What if their vocabulary about change and innovation had underlying deep cultural assumptions in the grip of centuries old ways of thinking that exclude other vocabularies.

Helping students understand the cultural non-neutrality of computers is essential if they are to have the ability to know when computers should and should not be used. If students are left with the idea that technology, including computers, as a culturally neutral tool, decisions about their use will more likely be dictated by the Western assumption that equates the use of technology with a modern, and progressive ways of thinking. Educators should continually engage the students in a discussion by giving particular attention to what is causing the

marginalization of the cultural commons and an increasing dependence upon Western technology and consumerism.

Together with their local communities, educators must establish, assess and determine what aspects of the cultural commons should be conserved or renewed, and have the language necessary for providing a thick rich description of the problems faced in contemporary culture, including what has already been lost in Western culture such as one's privacy, face-to-face interactions, craft knowledge and skills. Metaphors of change, innovation, progress and personalization are distractions in education, and carry with them patterns of thinking that encourage epistemological bias and social segregation that is inconsistent with public education as a social institution. The local cultural commons reassert education as a free, public and diverse social institution.

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