



Why “ _____ ” Matters



Chapter 3 Shift Disturbing

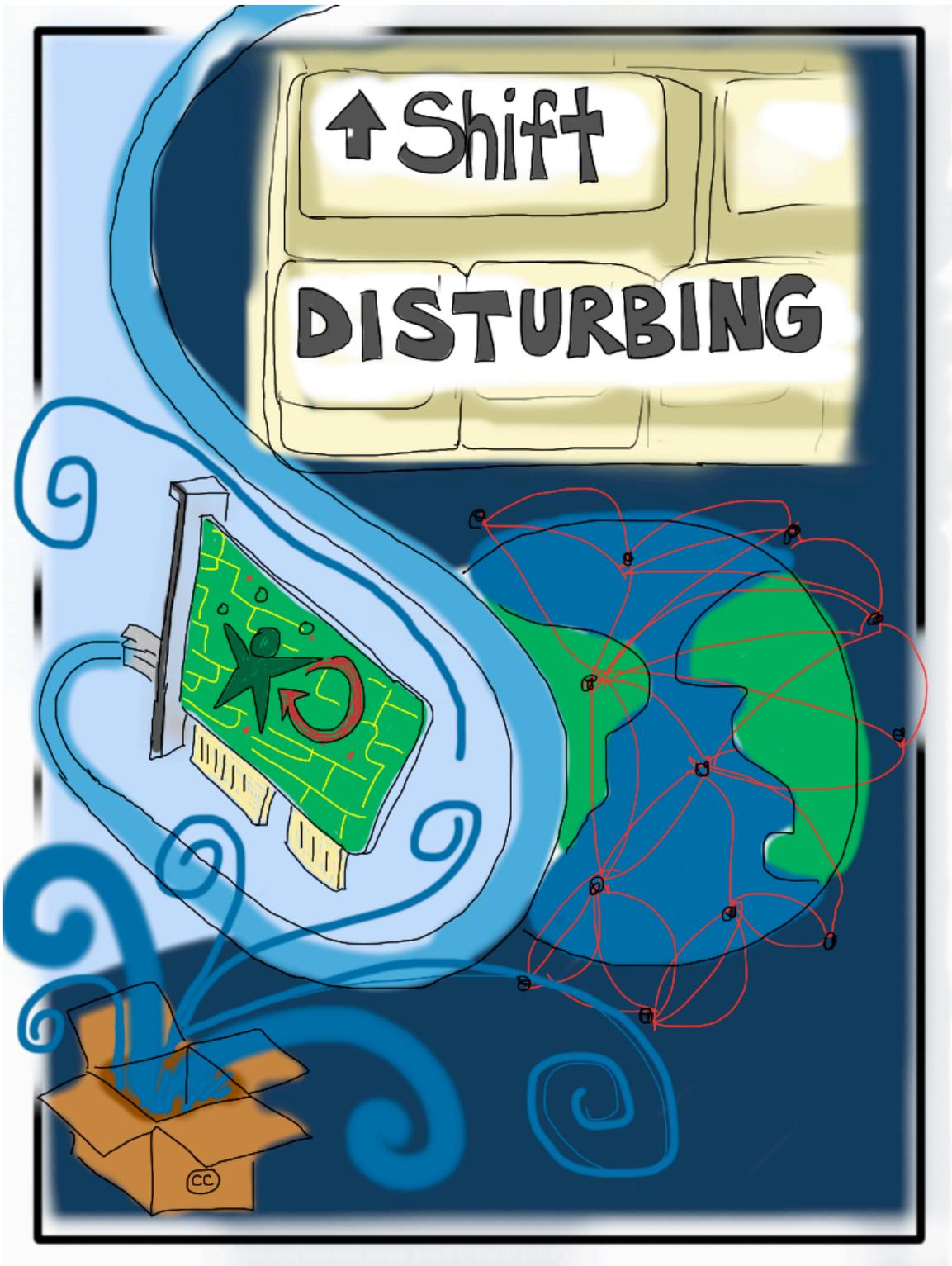


Image by Giulia Forsythe <http://gforsythe.ca>

WHY BIG QUESTIONS MATTER



A story shared by Daryl Bambic at Northern Edge Algonquin on August 7, 2011

WHY DIGITAL LITERACY MATTERS



by *Zoe Branigan-Pipe*

Why do we support the domination of text based knowledge and organized learning environments when technology allows for multi-modal forms of learning?

It is no longer just about truth, or fact, or experience, or individual demonstration. Knowledge is about perspective, choice and connections. It is about critical thought, inquiry and transparency. It is not just about search and retrieval of facts. It is about seeking out as many resources, people, tools and methods as possible, and making this information transparent and relevant.

I wonder - Do the affordances of these technologies, which widen our networks, also widen our cognitive capacities?

In this digital age, in the tools I use and the media I choose, I have grown to think differently about knowledge and how to access and demonstrate it. These instruments of learning and their interchangeable nature, have in many ways freed me from feelings of inadequacy. By accessing a networked system of information, people, experiences and applications, I am able to consider the opinions, ideas and created works of others, in order to demonstrate my own knowledge. I have shifted from a largely linguistic base, to express my thoughts through visuals, animation, colour and even dimensionality. I am more than a recipient in a 'delivery of information' model. The Internet provides tools, platforms and people that are so diverse and offer so many ways of creating, that I can be an artist, a composer, a videographer, a song writer, a scientist and a writer - anyone can.

I wonder - Have these aesthetic choices caused us to shift in how we think in terms of text production consumption?

The plethora of resources has given me the skills and confidence to not only to write and reflect, but also to share and discuss these thoughts with a community that spans our planet. My knowledge is far more than what I can demonstrate - individually- at any given moment as it is

about being able to tap into the expertise of others. It is about how I synthesize and apply from an abundance of information while making connections to my own life - that enriches.

I wonder - Is it relevant to measure individual knowledge when it depends on the connections, expertise and access to others?

WHY BIG QUESTIONS MATTER



by *[Daryl Bambi](#)*

When we ask big questions, we wonder about the ultimate meaning and purpose of a thing. The students ask, “Why do we need to learn this?” The teachers wonder about the effectiveness of assessment for learning. The administrators question if the capital investment in the latest technology really leverages student learning. To be involved in education means to wrestle with big questions and stakeholders in education, who do not engage in this process, have not yet found their voice in this conversation.

A ‘big question’ wants to discover the essence of a thing; it drives the questioner to the heart of the matter and throws them into the uncertain waters of competing theories and uncomfortable facts. Big questions are disruptive. It takes courage and audacity to ask the big questions. What is true? Why is this important? These questions are intrinsically valuable because of their ability to reorient the searcher towards meaning and purpose that, ultimately, they must construct for themselves.

Teachers like to say that there are no stupid questions, but we know that they are not all equal in value. While some may interpret “Why do we need to know this?” as a challenge to authority, it may also be an opportunity to ask the bigger questions in the classroom. Relevance is not a secondary issue for learners; meaning and purpose are the double helix structure of the learning process and just as neuronal synapses and circuits connect brain structures to form mind, students need to make connections between the curriculum and their own life experiences.

When students begin to articulate their own big questions, we know that they are fully engaged in the process of finding out what is true. These ‘big questions’ often become their own road map of organizing principles that assemble people, opportunities, lessons and work into a life collage. Plato would have measured his students’ growth by their questions and not their answers. And while the answers are vital, the big questions, it seems to me, are even more vital because they are evidence of connection, learning, interest and real growth.

WHY OPENNESS MATTERS



by *[Alec Couros](#)*

My fascination with openness began more than a decade ago after reading Raymond's (1997) essay, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*. The essay's central thesis, "Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow", describes a socially-based theory of knowledge which, at the time, was used to highlight the collaborative methodologies employed by programmers to develop GNU/Linux. Raymond wrote, "who could have thought that even five years ago that a world-class operating system could coalesce as if by magic out of part-time hacking by several thousand developers scattered all over the planet, connected only by tenuous strands of the Internet?" (p. 17). A decade later, as we have seen the dramatic emergence of weblogs, wikis, microblogging, and other social media, it may not seem as 'magic' to those who have become accustomed to web collaboration. However, at the root of openness, lies an idea of central importance to educators of all subject areas, levels, and sectors: knowledge needs to be free.

There are opponents to this idea. Our knowledge economy is heavily influenced by industrial economy values and Lockean views on labour and property. For content producers who are compensated directly for sale of creative works, there are some valid arguments to protect work. However, for educators representing our public educational systems, there is little excuse for practice without a thoughtful approach to openness, sharing & transparency.

You see, it's not just about considering a Creative Commons (CC) license when you publish that next unit plan. And it's not just having students understand, utilize and add to the plethora of CC content found across the web. Nor is it simply about choosing an open access venue for that next publication. It's bigger than that. Openness is a culture, an ideology, and a methodology - it is about co-creating knowledge for the benefit of known and unknown others. It represents a better way for humans to work collaboratively on meaningful, shared pursuits.

WHY AUTONOMOUS LEARNING AND PLAY MATTERS



by [*Melanie McBride*](#)

They don't. Mostly because genuine autonomy has never been the goal of schooling or education. Cornelius Castoriadis, the philosopher of autonomy, defines autonomy as the 'voluntary' creation and enactment of one's own laws. The opposite of autonomy is 'heteronomy,' which is the state of being governed by external laws or structures. Or what Castoriadis refers to as 'extra-social authorities' (however imaginary, traditional or institutionalized). Autonomy is central to two things that we claim to care about in education: learning and play. Unfortunately, both learning and play are often defined according to 'purposive' and utilitarian rhetoric (i.e., production, performance, etc) that mislead us into thinking we are doing or supporting either. For in order for play or learning to be truly autonomous, a person must be in a position to reflect and make their own meaningful choices based on their own criteria - rather than deferring to an internalized or external authority or structure. I define the praxis of autonomy as: choice of play/learning objects (what), location/environment (where), time of day (when), selection of co-learner/players (who), personally defined approaches/processes (how) and finally, a meaningful interest or context for doing so (why). Though it is possible for learners to experience autonomy in school, they often must do so despite or in opposition to heteronomous requirements of their attention, energy, behaviour and interest. Furthermore, the teacher's identity as a power holder who is in a position to assess and evaluate the learner's behaviour or activities mediates what those learners choose to share, perform or engage by virtue of their authority within that space. No amount of prescribed 'engagement', play or productivity will ever reveal a learner's actual state of being simply because we claim. Having chosen to focus my research and graduate thesis on informal situated learning and play outside of schools, I believe that the more we learn about, support and enable autonomous play and learning, the more we can begin to structure our learning environments and instructional practices in accordance with the intrinsic will that compels us to action in the rest of our lives. But we need to start with ourselves (I has ideas!).

WHY DISTURBANCE MATTERS



by *Brenda Dyck*

"There aren't any teachers until there are learners, and there aren't any learners until something is disturbed in the student's world." ~ Jay Rosen (tribute to Neil Postman)

It is my belief that as educators, it is essential to embrace and bask in the presence of cognitive disturbance in our own learning and search out ways to integrate it into our role as a teacher.

Cognitive Disturbance, an impersonal term most educators relate to a dusty textbook from their learning past, often springs to life in the form of a flutter of discomfort that comes after reading or hearing something that doesn't align with what we think or believe. Anything but impersonal, this unsettling notion or strange perspective invites us on a journey to further exploration and an opportunity for personal and professional growth. It is essential for teachers to feel supported as they rethink something they really thought they knew or believed and to challenge their students to do the same.

Educators; parents, family, and close friends; and favorite authors and theorists have become Great Disturbers in my own life- people who have prevented me from getting too comfortable with what I think I know and the catalysts that have encouraged me to welcome questions and be suspicious of easy answers and one-sided perspectives. The best thing about Great Disturbers is how their influence stays with you long after the conversation or reading took place or as Joe Rosen mused about Neil Postman:

"He will always disturb me. He will always teach me."

If you're looking for an unavoidable Great Disturber, it is hard to beat the emergence of technology in the schoolhouse since technology calls into question the pedagogical beliefs and

practices that teachers hold close to their heart and plant their flag on. The more important question in this place of disturbance centers on how do we navigate this discussion in an inclusive way so that credence is given to all parts of a healthy teaching ecosystem- the early adopters, the experimenters and yes, even the naysayers.

WHY COMPLEXITY MATTERS



by *[Clarence Fisher](#)*

Three years ago I received an email from a teacher in Rio de Janeiro telling me that one of her students had shared a few songs from her phone that one of my students had composed, recorded, and placed online. I pride myself on knowing my students well, on having a close connection with them, but I didn't know that this student had a creative side that he was sharing with the world.

That was fine though as far as my school was concerned because those skills didn't really count as learning. There was no way to place a value on the connections this student had, or on his creativity. The school was interested in if he could add fractions or answer questions about a piece of writing he had read, but my students who connected with nurses from Botswana to learn about their life in a village that had a 50% HIV infection rate, or with poverty activists in Bogota, weren't part of my institution's plan about what education and learning were like.

Yet, I believe that students working in ways like this are engaging the world more than was ever considered to be possible. Evaluating the biased views of ever shrinking news organizations and searching out real people to connect with is something our students must learn how to do. Having the skills to forge these connections - to think, and share, and create with other people around the globe is critical.

Growing these networks isn't easy. It takes time, skill and an understanding of how communities are built; all things our education system doesn't value because they are difficult to measure. Learning in a connected world is a complex enterprise that requires entirely new ways of measuring what counts as learning. It's easy to have our students answer the same questions on tests that we had to when we were kids. That system is predictable and safe. And it leaves our kids vulnerable in a changing world.

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