By Jurgen Faust

The Second Enlightenment Project

Evaluating all the conferences, books and articles, and online materials addressing the necessary changes within the academic environment results in a very impressive list of topics that should be considered in order to prepare higher education for the next decades. My own list of urgent topics, which I consider on a daily basis to make decisions, includes the following: from text to media literacy; multiple expertise; cross-disciplinary expertise; design expertise; customized learning; flexible environments to support individual timing; the new roles of faculty; knowledge management; team spirit and collaboration; management and leadership skills; global and international education; new programs for and links with the professional world; and the need for the supporting spaces and the technology that can help to make many of these things happen.

Some of these topics are indicators for paradigm shifts that will revolutionize the educational system. For instance, subsumed under the umbrella topic of "media literacy" is one of the most radical changes within science and academia. In the past, science was purely text-driven; images, a suspicious entity, were used only as decoration. But today, the technology-driven use of images, moving images, and sound within science, academia, and the world at large suggest that a "Second Enlightenment Project" has begun.[1]

Is the Second Enlightenment Project an emergence from our self-imposed immaturity in using images, moving images, and sound, caused by the exclusive domination of text? Or is it an intrinsic enlightenment, since sound and images are easier to produce and easy to distribute? Think about how difficult it is even for authoritative political systems to prevent communication and access to the Web. The Internet as a tool for communication is also a vehicle for mass communication and political participation on a scale exceeding anything governments have yet been able to achieve.

Yet media literacy, especially image literacy, is a loaded topic, as Western history shows. For instance, the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation reveals how images were often seen as very powerful, difficult-to-control forces. Our cognitive structure to handle images lies within our mythologically driven consciousness. According to current cognitive science, humans progressed from other primates by developing gestural, linguistic, and written storage and thought structures, thereby developing what Merlin Donald calls "mimetic," "mythic," and "theoretic" cultures.[2] The theoretic, or the text-based, culture follows the mythic, or the image, culture. If we understand this development, we can also comprehend the claim of the text-based science and academic culture as the only culture that can handle truth.

Thus the task of teaching image and media literacy is a difficult and complex enterprise. Currently, we educate students and faculty in the use of software, in their technical ability to manipulate images. But what this actually does is give amateurs the ability to present their immaturity in using images, sounds, and motion, as seen in thousands of PowerPoint and interactive CD-ROMs or videos every day. True, we can make the same argument regarding writing: there has never been as much written material as there is now. The difference is that we have a relatively developed educational system to teach reading and writing, but we have nothing comparable regarding sound, images, and video. Generally, our ability to produce images consciously is poorly developed because we are not educated to do so.

Project-Based Learning in Interdisciplinary Teams

How can we educate people to create images, sound, and video? First, we have to bring the image experts and the artists and designers to the table. They need to be integrated into interdisciplinary teams so that team members can learn from each other and can enhance the quality of rich-media products. Interdisciplinary teams consisting of artists, designers, engineers, and scientists are the best soil for new thinking, learning, and educational programming that will solve a problem holistically.

Project-based learning—in which various members of the project team share their talents, expertise, and knowledge—is a key for the future. It gives the team members an interdisciplinary education because they have to practice understanding the languages and concepts developed in the various departments and disciplines.

In addition, meeting places can no longer be confined within four walls, and meeting times cannot be set to a certain hour of the day or a specific day of the week. Interdisciplinary team members can even come from different continents. What will facilitate this is the new technology. Peers and team members

can be connected day and night, across the world. Wireless access to the Web, e-learning platforms, wikis, instant messaging, Skyping, and video-conferencing all allow team members to link up around the globe—to work across environments, across disciplines, and across cultures as well as across continents.

I recently generated and facilitated such a project between faculty and students from Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Art. To generate videogames, we brought together engineers and designers and art students, as well as students from the music school. The outcome was amazing. Even top designers and executives from Electronic Arts, who joined the final critique through video-conferencing, were impressed with the outcome. Their response was clear: this is the future of education, and this is the quality of talent they need. Afterward, a few of the students working on the team received job-interview offers.

To move in this direction, we need faculty who understand that their new role is different and includes coaching; we need faculty who are engaged to create these interdisciplinary, cross-environmental, and even cross-continental projects and teams. We have to look for academic staff who realize that these are the key concepts for the future. And we must hire college and university executives and presidents who can conceptualize and support these changes. Therefore, we also need to reform many college and university boards.

What is happening today in these areas is mainly sporadic, not systematic, because in most cases there is no support from the top leadership. But without these radical new programs, the academic institutions of the Western world will soon be outdated and will become "museums of education." Today, the future of education is happening in the developing world.

The Academic Future in the Developing World

In countries like China and India, as well as in many places in Latin America, higher education is accelerating because they do not have the problem of a conservative, defensive university system. In most cases, they can create their systems from scratch, driven by a high student population and an army of candidates who want access to higher education. For instance, China is engaged in the biggest university expansion in history. The Chinese are determined to create a superleague of universities to rival the best in the world. In the beginning they will undoubtedly copy what they studied extensively in Europe and North America (in many Chinese universities, one-third of the faculty have American and European doctorates). But China and other countries in the developing world will very quickly reform the educational systems. These countries have the technology, the ambition, and the knowledge that is available in the West, but they also have the growing resources and the large market to launch successful experiments.

This happened in the car, the machinery, and the electronic consumer industries over the past thirty years. I remember seeing Japanese visitors lying underneath each machine and copying each device. Others laughed about the first cars and the clones that the Japanese brought to the market, but now they are number one in the automobile industry. The next round will be intellectual property.

I recently accepted a new position as the Chief Academic Officer at CEDIM, a private art and design school in San Pedro, Monterrey, Mexico. I was recruited to design an international educational system more or less from scratch. I have a team of people from around the world, all of them—including an ambitious CEO—highly flexible, well educated, and very keen to create something exceptional. We have a fast-growing student body and resources, and we are in the stage of planning a new campus, which will open in the fall of 2007. Our vision is to create one of the world's top design schools within the next decade, inventing new educational designs to facilitate future education and to use them as a competitive advantage.

But in order to find such an environment, I had to move to the so-called developing world.

Notes

1. The first Enlightenment Project was an eighteenth-century movement focused on the ideals of good sense, benevolence, and a belief in liberty, justice, and equality as the natural rights of man. Immanual Kant, one of the main representatives of this historical project, wrote in 1784: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another."
2. See Merlin Donald: *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) and *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: Norton, 2001).

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