



SYMPOSIUM

A dialogue on core qualities and practices needed in education

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People, earth, dissonance and deep learning

Reflection by Rebekah Rousi

The time experienced at *Unfolding* can be described as calm, relaxing, *inspiring* and intense. The event was critical, engaging and informed. The combination of highly skilled and insightful professionals from a spectrum of areas related to education, research, as well as human-based issues, with an extremely warm, friendly and welcoming environment, made this a moving and holistic experience I will never forget. I had some initial hesitations about the name of the conference however, particularly in regards to its idealistic tone. Yet, upon experiencing the conference, the only element that was idealistic was the hope that there is hope in being able to steer our future and most importantly our children's future to that of fulfilment, happiness and well-being. The people who attended this event, and the issues and thinking that occurred, have the capacity to transform and unfold the potential of people and a world that is capable of being far more wonderful than it seems to be now.

I am a Postdoctoral Researcher in Cognitive Science, who came from Finland to attend the event on behalf of an Academy of Finland Strategy consortium called Awareness, Prevention and Early Intervention (APEX). The APEX Strategy consortium is led by Professor Andre Sourander and a team of Psychiatric researchers at the University of Turku, who have undertaken significant work in the field of early childhood mental health interventions - focusing on the family as a system, and working with this holistic emotional, cognitive, cultural and social system of the family to identify and address mental health issues in children and youth. Our team at the University of Jyväskylä, led by Professors Marja Kankaanranta and Marja-Leena Laakso, examines how digital interventions including a programme called Teenmentalhealth, developed by experts at Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Center, function and synergize into the processes and context of the Finnish education system, and the early implementation of the new Finnish National Curriculum.

Thus, considering how we fit, fuse and can transform together, the *Unfolding* conference offered many challenges to consider. The number one challenge that arose from a number of discussions and none the least, the most impressive Q&A with *Down to Earth* creator's Rolf Winters was: *if technology and what we consider as human progress is in fact what is holding us back from true human potential - potential in the sense of understanding what it is to be human and a part of the earth's ecosystem, then how can we transform it to enhance our wisdom and find new ways to not just preserve its sources (e.g., wisdom keepers) but proliferate them?*

Secondly, Colleen Mclaughlin's insight on 'dissonance' touched home on many levels. In terms of our relationship between dissonance and learning: in one of our group discussions someone mentioned how when they start learning, phenomena and associated concepts seem like a mess, which gradually clear up in the process. From my personal experience and background in visual arts and critical theory, the mess is an essential element in initiating the learning and exploration process. Unease of the uncertain bring us to theorise, reflect, test, challenge, and reflect again. It is never a process of finding an answer, and drawing a complete understanding, although we might have those moments or epiphanies in which we feel we understand, but rather it is a process of constantly picking, scrutinizing and performing elements then organically moving onto the next issues.

Thus, from a professional perspective, dissonance may be one explanatory factor between understanding that things are good and knowing that for instance, career steps are proficiently moving forward, but the overall sentiment one is left with at the end of the day is a lack of satisfaction. Thus, in this case, the dissonance comes into play when considering the alignment of societal or institutional values with one's own. Are they aligned? And, do we feel fulfilled by following institutional strategies, particularly if they are not aligned with our understanding of particularly overall, or *holistic*, well-being?

Finally (and there is much more, but I will limit it to this), and as mentioned in the opening paragraph, the people who attended this event gave me hope that there is a chance that we can transform the elements that so grimly characterize our current political, societal, economic and environmental climate. I did not hear anyone who was content with leaving education and global dynamics 'as is', and I did not hear anyone who had any quick fix solutions. Everyone attended the event with a critical mind. Everyone experienced on some level some element of dissonance. And more than anything, everyone there was open, welcoming and willing to share insight with one another.

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