

Start Where You Are

Reading Time: 5-7 minutes

I imagine a future where people are generous with their unique gifts and their hearts, acting without fear of judgement, ridicule or derision, knowing their contributions will be heard, valued, respected and engaged. They are encouraged to seek out, discover and honor their gifts from a very young age and their entire educational journey is designed from the ground up to help them uncover, develop and offer those unique gifts to their local and hyper-local human and Earth communities as well as our interconnected bioregional and global communities.

I imagine a future where educators the world over are empowered, supported and admired by their communities and have remade their local educational models to support the development of each child's unique gifts, talents and predilections. As their students are growing, they are developing and encouraging their heart qualities of love, kindness, presence and compassion; they are developing close relationships with their human peers and mentors well as with all the inhabitants of their local biological community. The students contribute their gifts to the efforts of their local communities to rejuvenate and regenerate natural habitats and environments and regularly celebrate their successes with groups outside their own.

Many of the things we need to reimagine and recreate may seem impossible or highly unlikely upon first read. You might initially feel discouraged or dismissive. That's OK. Think of those responses as a reflection of just how far away from a more beautiful world our patterns of thinking, stories and systems have carried us in the modern industrial era, referred to by some as the Anthropocene. However, it's also important to remember that so many things have happened just in the last 150 years that would have seemed outlandish or impossible even a single generation before their occurrence. Political upheavals, political borders changing, ideological shifts, technological changes, sports or scientific achievements and the list goes on. It also points to the importance of having a strong and inspiring vision to begin with. When we lose our way or become discouraged, our vision re-inspires us and helps orient us in the long, dark hallway of the transition to a more beautiful global human presence and society.

Perhaps, like most educators in modern societies, you're in an educational setting that organizes itself strictly by children's ages and it's something you'd like to shift. At the moment, you can't imagine any way of shifting that. Even if it's not explicitly towards *that* particular idea, find some small step you can take towards the vision of a more beautiful world. Find the step you can do and try something, while holding your bigger vision in mind.

Start where you are, even if that means with your discouragement or hopelessness. There are scores of inspiring stories about people who have persevered through similar territory.

Recall, we're educating for the emergence of a different story of global humanity. Not the old stories of separation, domination or economic growth and power that has organized the systems of western colonialism and its subsequent systems of control, segregation and hierarchy. Those stories and ways of being on Earth have run their course. This emerging story is one of inclusion, equality, stewardship and the ancient qualities of the human heart

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— nobility, love, kindness, compassion, empathy, openness, generosity, acceptance, forgiveness. The primacy of this story is being rediscovered and we need to educate our youth to carry this story into their adulthood. It is a noble and humble calling. Noble because it is a magnificent vision of the potential of human beings. Humble because it will likely happen in degrees so small, we may never even understand or even believe in our contributions. After all, who even knows the names of all the people involved in the great populist movements against dysfunctional or repressive social and political systems throughout the history of civilizations. Yet every voice, every contribution, every meal prepared was necessary.

Something new, yet rooted in our earth-lineage, is dawning throughout human consciousness. New because never before in the history of the human lineage have we been called upon to so fully engage our co-creative powers and potential across the entire planet. We've only been tasked with making adaptations at a more local or regional level. The level of creativity and engagement required is unprecedented. It is rooted in our earth-lineage because adaptation and creativity are a fundamental feature of the earth itself and a part of all the life forms that have ever been brought into existence. We're now being called upon to birth a new human civilization that is planetary in scope and which is rooted in the same interconnectedness and interdependence that we witness in the Earth and the cosmos. Going forward, this will require a new way of being human and will change how we manifest our global presence on Earth.

So we start wherever we are, which will be different for everyone. One of the key activities to which students at all levels need to be exposed is the art of asking questions. Questions guide our attention and energy and help us imagine and create visions for our own particular circumstances and then find small, actionable steps we can do to bring our vision to fruition. Making questions conscious and engaging those questions is an easy way to take small steps towards a beautiful vision.

For example, if you happen to be starting with discouragement or hopelessness, perhaps a helpful question may be,

“What is a story I can find that will remind me that great things happen with a vision and small, often unnoticeable steps in the direction of the vision?”

From that question, perhaps you'll read about Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Mahatma Gandhi. You may find stories of those who have worked to protect animals or restore ecosystems or called attention to toxins in our environment. There are no shortage of inspiring stories. Questions like this are easily adapted for students at every level.

The perspectives and mindsets of this massive transformation in human consciousness and behavior are things to which students at all levels need to be exposed. Making our questions conscious is an easy place to begin. This applies to the questions you ask yourself and to your students and includes questions that inspire imagination, co-creativity and envisioning our future.

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Here are some easy ones to get started. Use or adapt these, make up your own and, depending upon the ages of your students, have them create their own questions for visioning.

- ▶ What's one thing I can do today, no matter how small, that would increase my joy and bring me alive?
- ▶ What does my ideal, joy-filled life look like?
- ▶ What would my ideal, joy-filled classroom look like?
- ▶ What's one thing I can do today, no matter how small, that would move me in the direction of.. (something from your vision), for example, mixing age groups, mentoring students, bringing children together who share a common interest in a particular area or inquiry?
- ▶ What if we actually could? What would it look like?
- ▶ How good could it possibly get?
- ▶ What would be our ideal and what might that look like?