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Ten Ways Forward

Contribution to GTI Forum [The Pedagogy of Transition](#)

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For those who understand, it is crystal clear. Our educational traditions need to be transformed from infancy to old age, to give us the skills and understanding to tackle our huge civilizational challenges: the climate crisis; the biodiversity crisis; the crisis of injustice, inequality, dominating corporations, and destructive economics; and the crisis of purpose, trust, and deluded populism. They intertwine, creating a tangled knot that generates cynicism, anger, and despair.

The authoritarian rote learning that causes so many to dislike school and cease learning once they graduate needs to be replaced with learning that nurtures creativity, curiosity, and joy. I have organized my thoughts into ten headings, and I conclude by asking how we can make change happen.

1. **Full-Being Education.** We need to remove the cultural straitjacket that limits education to the mind, and open it to the full range of senses and feelings. We need to find ways for children to explore their sense of the spiritual without offending a minority's religious views. We need to encourage open discussion about love, compassion, tenderness, bullying, anger, resentment, jealousy, divorce, domination, and cooperation. We need free-play zones where children can explore creativity and risk, without being coddled for fear of a lawsuit.

2. **Early Childhood Education.** We need to overcome the harmful psychological impacts that poverty, fear, and authoritarian parenting can have on toddlers, and the way to do so is through widely accessible, affordable early childhood education.

3. **Ecological Education.** Our tragedy is that we have CEOs, economists, government leaders, and MBA teachers who are ecologically ignorant, who can't explain the carbon cycle or the role of keystone species. We have teachers who teach about the climate crisis but from a "this is awful" perspective, not from a "we can do it" solutions perspective. We have school buildings that are dull and institutional, and school-grounds that are concrete and grass. We need to make restorative ecological education the fifth R, an essential part of the core curriculum. Every school needs to have safe bike routes to school, extensive food gardens, trees, native plants, wetlands, ponds, pollinators, hedgerows, winding trails, birds nests, and spaces for outdoor classes sheltered from the wind.

4. **Practical Education.** We need every child to be able to experience hands-on crafts, including farming, forestry, woodwork, metalwork, cooking, repairing, painting, building, bicycle repair, computer repair, child care, pet care, and elder care. We need to connect schools to their local communities, connecting the learning process with the real world in projects where children and students learn with their heads, hearts, and hands, not just with theories and concepts. Everything from creek restoration projects to making music in seniors' homes, from painting murals to helping on community farms, from starting cooperative enterprises to assisting local non-profits.

5. **Arts Education.** We need music, art, poetry, storytelling, and drama for all, not just as an option for those who can afford it. When we take the arts out of education, we take the soul out of learning. The arts are the doorway to a realm where there is no right or wrong, where we open to wonder, beauty, and awe, and the delight of creative expression.

6. **Civics Education.** We need civics education that enables students to distinguish real news from fake; to think for themselves; to perceive racism, sexism, bias, and prejudice; and to communicate respectfully. We need democracy in our schools, with participatory budgeting and elections for student leadership roles. [Educating for American Democracy](#) has laid out a road map, suggesting ways to reimagine how we teach social studies, history, and civics.

7. **Big History Education.** I use the term deliberately, referring to the work of the [Big History Project](#). We need to replace the rote learning of wars, kings, and presidents with an exploration of cosmic beginnings, evolution, anthropology, world history, geography, politics, and economics—but cooperative, ecological, and community economics, not the neoclassical economics that is taught in every college, a dangerous elite ideology of rational self-interest that lies at the heart of our troubles. Most importantly, children need to be able to understand the tension between cooperation and domination, which has filled our civilizations with tragedy, and which plays out every day in families, classrooms, schoolyards, and dating behaviors.

8. **Respect for Teachers.** People talk about the Finnish model, and with good reason, for it works. Finnish teachers are well-trained, well-respected, well-paid, and trusted to get on with their job. They don't suffer endless requests from administrators for tests and performance metrics. Students are encouraged to follow their innate curiosity; Finnish schools break all the expectations of classroom conformity. Because of the consistency of Finnish government policy they enjoy the same high standard of education all over the country, regardless of geographic location or socioeconomic background. In response, they achieve consistently high scores in the PISA tests, including for student life satisfaction. Finland teaches [critical thinking skills starting in primary school](#), and as a result, it has become the most successful country in Europe in [resisting fake news](#). It is a pretty good model to aspire to.

9. **Transforming Universities.** This may be the toughest challenge, for so much salary, status, and grant-chasing is tied to old-fashioned understandings and methods of teaching, far from the Sustainability Mindset we so urgently need. It is not enough to offer a range of sustainability courses: we need sustainability to course through the entire university, in every department, in the way it invests and the way it restores local biodiversity. Universities need to make certification in Ecology 101 a prerequisite for entry for all new students, staff, and administrators, and for all staff seeking tenure or promotion.

10. **Life-Long Learning.** We need to invest in lifelong learning. In the 1930s, Study Circles offered a path to transformative change for American Blacks and for Nova Scotians in the Antigonish movement who wanted to improve their lives and incomes by starting cooperative

enterprises. It begins with talk and leads to action. We need an explosion of Study Circles where people can learn how to tackle the climate emergency, how to restore democracy, how to restore biodiversity, how to build community economies, and how to achieve the transition to a new ecological civilization.

How can all this be done? We need a core group of committed educational leaders who will push for a federal commission to transform school education. We need a similar group of university leaders who will do the same, and a similar process to transform continuing education and release the potential of Study Circles. One of the blessings of COVID is the ease of virtual meetings, because everyone's at home, and not going anywhere. Now is the best of all times to advance progress on these fronts.

About the Author



Guy Dauncey is an author and ecofuturist working to develop a positive vision of a sustainable future, and to translate that vision into action. He is the founder of the British Columbia Sustainable Energy Association, and the author or co-author of ten books, including *The Climate Challenge: 101 Solutions to Global Warming* and *Journey to the Future: A Better World Is Possible*. He is an Honorary Member of the Planning Institute of British Columbia, a Fellow of the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

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