

ComBining

From 'Combining' by Nora Bateson

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A List of Relevant Questions

The world is in trouble. There is serious work to be done. Quickly - what follows is my shortlist of serious questions for this era. Structural change is required. To get there requires epistemological change. This list assumes that profit, revenge, ownership, and any notion of superiority including nationalism are not viable excuses for the destruction of billions of living systems. The committees that are formed, the projects that are funded, the actions taken, the policies made - all are in response to the questions posed. So what are those questions? Here are mine.

All of the questions below are of personal, institutional, and global concern. "We" in this document refers to anyone who will ask such questions with me.

Education: How can we best cultivate curiosity, information, and learning between generations to prepare ourselves to perceive and respond to the complexity of our world with less destruction than in centuries past?

Health: How can we support health in human beings by making it possible for each person to eat healthy food, sleep well, know that their families are supported, be respected in their community, have relevant contributions (education and employment), breathe clean air, and drink clean water?

Ecology: How can we interface with the complexity of our natural world so as to cause less harm to the interdependence of all living things?

Economy: How can we shift the economic system so that it is not based upon exploitation of nature and humanity, without crashing the globe into chaos? (note: no one gets rich on this version of economy)

Politics: How do we get the policy makers of our world to mandate cross-sector information for their decision making processes so that they have the possibility of taking into account complexity?

Media: How do we get a moratorium on binaries? How do we support public understanding, not trained in perceiving complexity, to become accustomed to it and demand that communications institutions deliver cross-contextual information?

Culture: What is the approach to open the global discussion about the pending fate of humanity? What matters? What are we willing to change? How can we survive together?

Transcontextual

Transcontextual

"Let me coin the word "transcontextual" as a general term for this genus of syndromes.

It seems that both those whose life is enriched by transcontextual gifts and those who are impoverished by transcontextual confusions are alike in one respect: for them there is always or often a "double take."

A falling leaf, the greeting of a friend, or a "primrose by the river's brim" is not "just that and nothing more." Exogenous experience may be framed in the contexts of dream, and internal thought may be projected into the contexts of the external world. And so on. For all this, we seek a partial explanation in learning and experience."

(G. Bateson, 2002, p.277)

Law - Family - Health

CONSENT

"Go for it" - Motto of the modern world.
"Just do it" - Nike slogan

IMMIGRATION
Legal systems are (also) struggling
with increasing pressures to
harmonize with international norms
that differ from local traditions.

ADDICTION

Clearly the sale and use of
prescription drugs outside the
dosage given by a medical
professional is illegal. So are the
peripheral petty crimes and more
serious criminality that come with
drug culture. Additionally, the
malpractice and other lawsuits
against and between practitioners,
treatment centers, and other legal
snags, represent a vast body of
legal work.

Criminality is often the first
cultural stigma that gives imagery
to the topic of drug addiction. This
criminality suppresses communication
of the systemic societal issue that
is emerging as it effectively gags
families, doctors, and other people
whose lives are changed by
addiction.

IMMIGRATION
Colonialism is not a thing of the past.

ADDICTION

When one person in a family, community, or society is suffering from addiction the entire network of relationships in that individual's life is affected.

CONSENT

Each family has a culture of its own, scars of its own.

IMMIGRATION

Between generations, at the dinner table, in the garden or the market, this is where ideological threads are woven into the ecology of institutional systems. Families are where attitudes toward other people and nature are expressed and passed on.

SCHOOLS & INVESTMENT

What is it like to be young in a moment when the shared vision of the future is filled with upheaval? What dreams, what stories, what forecasting can children today hold onto? Will they follow the path of the generations that came before them?

Education - Politics - Ecology

ADDICTION

Educational institutions have a responsibility to become informed about how drugs, that are commonly known as "study drugs" and prescribed as ADHD medication, are incorporated into school culture. At the elementary school level, the diagnosis and treatment of attention-related issues need to be put into the larger context of the long-term health of the child.

INVESTMENT & SCHOOLS

Education that takes place in nature stimulates entirely different sets of cognitive processes. Wilderness as a classroom is the original laboratory, playground, and library of organisms in interaction.

CONSENT

Gender roles and expected behaviors are woven into the classroom experience.

CONSENT

The law cannot effectively meet the challenges of consent. Rape and abuse accusations require evidence, which is often impossible to provide.

SCHOOLS & INVESTMENT

What is learned about social engagement and responsibility in school? With the rise of populism in the theater of international politics in recent years, it has become apparent that there is a need for a citizen base that demands more than binary positions.

IMMIGRATION

Democracy is under-equipped in its current form to accommodate the complexity of the issues emerging globally.

CONSENT

Attention to destructive patterns of exploitation between people may help make visible the exploitation by humanity of the environment.

INVESTMENT & SCHOOLS

There is an urgent need for an education system that offers the conditions through which perception of the complexity of the environment, as well as of each other, is possible. It is a mistake to think that young children cannot see, or work with, complexity.

ADDICTION

The political implications of legalizing and making available medications has a complicated history in terms of culture, morals, and money trails. The ongoing developments in research also influence this process. The dual economies of the pharmaceutical and black market sales of drugs both create and sustain political involvement.

ADDICTION

While it might seem that issues of addiction are limited to the parameters of the drug culture there are patterns within this crisis that relate to the larger societal issues. Addiction, like ecology, is formed through a combination of patterns of living and cognition that together become inextricably interwoven.

IMMIGRATION

The ways in which ecological changes will affect culture and economy are yet to be seen.

Economy - Culture - Technology

CONSENT

What are the economic repercussions of denying consent?

IMMIGRATION

Information about complex topics like climate, global economy, and the refugee crisis is rarely communicated in its full complexity over mainstream media and journalism. Mostly stories that have more than two sides are regarded as complicated and unsellable.

SCHOOLS & INVESTMENT

The idea that there are right and wrong answers is a cultural binary that undermines inquiry into complexity and diverts us towards problem-solving attitudes throughout every sector of society. Misunderstood complexity often results in an ill-informed need for solutions, strategies, concrete deliverables and other products of linear thinking. This approach is perpetually confounding those needing to grasp, and deal with, complex circumstances.

CONSENT

The media provides the conduit through which many unspoken assumptions are conveyed. Consent is woven into ideas of dating and into love stories.

IMMIGRATION

The most familiar line of discussion around the refugee crisis is that the arrival of people in need will disrupt and perhaps destroy existing economies.

INVESTMENT

If extraction and exploitation become impossible to continue, the entire basis of profits and markets will be disrupted. What will be the skills that will be relevant in such a society? While this may seem far-fetched, it is a question worth pondering.

CONSENT

The mechanistic efficiency of technology seems only to increase. The "next gen" stuff is always faster, smoother, and trickier than the previous model.

INVESTMENT & SCHOOLS

What are the similarities between history and algebra? This sort of connection may seem unusual to consider at first, but not impossible. Both require that students think in terms of variables.

IMMIGRATION

Human beings are creatures of place, and our identity, belonging, and well-being are woven into landscapes that house our history.

SCHOOLS

The metaphors that run through the culture inform the collective in ways that are so deeply rooted that they are hardly visible. Presumptions regarding authority, dominance, status, and even the notion of what health and happiness should look like, are culturally scripted into daily life.

CONSENT

What does it mean to be desirable? Where do these ideas come from?

ADDICTION

What does a successful life look like? The purveyors of the imagery of success and happiness are largely cultural. The often unspoken assumptions of what is normal, what is expected, and what is respected are potent messages about how to live. Skinny, beautiful, rich, successful, fit, perfect people are plastered all over the media.

ADDICTION

The cost of responding to widespread addiction issues as they crop up in their varying forms is astronomical. From treatment centers to unemployment, from overdose care to automobile accidents, psychological treatment, legal fees, prison costs, foster care, education and so on. Addiction is expensive to address, and the expense crosses many sectors.