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Schooling "Creative-Empaths" for a brighter and peaceful Future

Ashfaq Ishaq (Washington, D.C.)

The interplay of creativity and empathy has the potential to reduce violence and bring peace. There is, however, a crisis today reflected in failures in creativity and empathy. These failures are examined in relation to the current Fourth Industrial Revolution that will make artificial intelligence, robotics, and blockchains ubiquitous. It is argued that empathy should be the operating principle of this new revolution, rather than greed or avarice, in order to reduce the growing wealth inequalities, the fears of mass unemployment, and the likelihood of ecological disasters. Schooling "creative-empaths" is analyzed for this purpose. As an example of transformative experiences that can foster creativity and infuse it with empathy, the approach adopted by the World Children's Festival is described. Though the discussion centers on the United States, the world festival's methodology can be tailored for interventions for empathy and peacemaking when planned in other cities or countries by organizations or businesses.

Humankind stands at a crossroads today. The world is polarized and nations are bitterly divided. Riots and demonstrations keep flaring up in one city after another. People dread climate change, which is growing out of control. Pent-up anger at the rising economic disparities is bursting at the seams. Many people think they are victims of somebody else, so they seek solace in their silos or affirmation in their echo chambers. Nostalgia has become the enemy of societal change. When a nation is at war with itself, conflicts with any foreign adversary become more likely as a tactic to unite the people, even if temporarily.

A new hope, meanwhile, has arrived at the doorstep. The Fourth Industrial Revolution promises to fundamentally alter the way children will live and work, think and learn, imagine and create because their physical, digital, and biological spheres will become more blended and eventually seamless. Manmade artificial intelligence will sharpen their wits, and robotics will free them from drudgery. As the gap between man and machine evaporates, the young might start to look at each other differently, altering their perspectives and erasing inherited prejudices to bring humankind to the side of humanity. The choice is stark. How a community or a country foregoes conflict and prepares its schoolchildren for the new revolution requires educators and parents to mobilize, in order to democratize creativity and spread empathy—salient human attributes to save civilization and help build a new one.

But these attributes need to be nurtured in formative years before creativity is lost and empathy withers away. How educators and parents face this challenge will determine the future. They can plant the seeds of freedom by teaching and modeling for children *how* to think, not *what* to think. This can allow children to step boldly beyond the boundaries set before them and challenge the norm. To help them in this process and to inspire and embolden schoolchildren, the International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) organizes the Arts Olympiad—the world’s largest school art program for students’ creative development. The Arts Olympiad winners from across the United States and around the world come together at the World Children’s Festival (WCF), which ICAF produces as a transformative experience that imbues students’ creativity with empathy. A nonprofit organization, ICAF is in the business of producing “creative-empaths”—the new revolutionaries who can work together to shape the new revolution, so it ensures sustainability, shared prosperity, and a peaceful future. Before

describing this methodology, it is important to understand the salience of creativity and empathy.

Creativity

The ability to imagine the unimaginable, develop a potent idea, nurse it through with surgical precision, and chaperon it to fulfillment can be summed up by the word, creativity. “It is no exaggeration at all to say that creativity is the key to a more advanced humanity,” claimed Barron, Montuori, and Barron (1997). Creative individuals are described by Dacey and Lennon (1998) as being open and tolerant of ambiguity, which allows them to create their own structures or operate effectively when no structure exists. Young children learn much about the world through imaginative and social play. These early experiences can foster creativity and openness to experience, which deepens empathic relationships with others who are unlike oneself.

KH Kim (2011) has concluded that American creativity declined from the 1990s to 2008 and that the decline since 2008 maybe even worse. Creativity guru Ken Robinson (2001) has asserted that children get schooled out of their creativity. The 2015-16 data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that while one in four of the 132,853 schools in the U.S. is private, only one in ten PK-12 students are enrolled in private schools. Smaller private school classes facilitate student-centered learning, which can nurture creativity. In contrast, students in low-income areas end up attending their big neighborhood public schools where drugs, safety, and discipline are everyday concerns, not deep learning or critical thinking. Creativity is an equalizer that levels the playfield field but lacking creative development the young get trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, which their children can inherit too.

Creativity is a leadership skill for the privileged and survival skill of the poor. Creativity can blaze new trails out of raw materials of current information for one to move beyond social constraints towards innovative ways of being (Sidney-Ando, 2014). In an increasingly interconnected world, creativity requires a global framework. An idea with local relevance cannot grow or persist for long if it lacks a broader national or global appeal. The sooner students start testing themselves in the global marketplace of ideas and experiences, the stronger grows their potential to contribute to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Creativity is generally considered something inherently positive though it can be intentionally applied to harm others on occasion. In fact, creativity is morally neutral, and it is dangerous to think otherwise. Studies have shown that creative individuals are more likely to manipulate test results (Gino & Ariely, 2012) tell more varied lies (Walczyk, Runco, Tripp, & Smith, 2008), show less integrity (Beaussart, Andrews, & Kaufman, 2013), and are deceptive during conflict negotiation (De Dreu & Nijstad, 2008). Qualitative accounts of malevolent creativity in the art (forgery), science (academic dishonesty), and technology (cybercrime) are analyzed by Kapoor, Tagat, and Cropley (2016) and in terrorism and crime by Cropley, Kaufmann, Cropley (2008). Social information processing theory states that individuals are shaped by their social context, which also explains malevolent or dark creativity (Runco, 2010; and Gutworth, Cushenbery, and Hunter, 2016). What makes creativity positive, so it benefits society? Empathy—the mother of all emotions.

Empathy

A vital human competency, empathy is both an emotional and cognitive experience that reflects the beginnings of concern for the well-being of others. Philosophical and psychological

theories of moral and prosocial development had consistently viewed young children as egocentric, demanding, and focused on their own needs (Zahn-Waxler, Schoen, & Decety, 2018). We now know empathy is present from the earliest years of life and that it motivates later caring actions toward others. Cognitive empathy increases more with age than emotional or affective empathy. This is consistent with the fact that the two are experienced in different brain regions that develop and evolve differently over time. As children get older, cognitive development expands exponentially so that the cognitive components of empathy become more sophisticated. Children may develop a theory of mind, which enables perspective taking—the ability to stand in someone else’s shoes and experience what they feel. Like affective empathy, expressions of cognitive empathy depend upon various factors, including genetics, temperament, online habits, and the home and school environment.

The first thing that children learn is family customs and traditions, their tribal heritage and history. They grow up believing how moral and authentic is the narrative of their tribe. They develop compassion—or what some neuroscientists call “parochial” empathy—for their family and tribe. The stronger this parochial empathy, the less empathy there may be for other tribes and the deeper the fear and animosity toward outsiders and outgroups (Bruneau, 2018). The transmission of fear, hatred and trauma is passed on from one generation to the next, quite like melanin and other physical traits. This tribalism does not favor democracy, social harmony, economic equity or social justice. This highlights the potential for working with children to help them cross boundaries and reduce prejudices (Killien & Smetana, 2014).

In 2018, 5.7 million students attended the 34,576 private schools in the U.S., of which 39 percent attended Catholic

schools, 22 percent nonsectarian or nonreligious, 13.5 percent conservative Christian, and almost 10 percent “other” religiously affiliated (covering more than 50 religions). Between 1991-92 and 2015-16, the number of students attending conservative Christian schools increased from 12 percent to 13.5 percent. The number attending Jewish schools increased from 3.4 percent to 6.1 percent. The number attending Islamic schools increased from 0.1 percent to 0.8 percent. Adding another shade to this background are children who are homeschooled, their number increased from 250,000 in 1990 to 2.3 million in 2016 according to the National Home Education Research Institute. A diverse educational structure provides parents an array of choices, but it can also create ingroups and outgroups. The one in ten students who attend private schools may develop an elitist perspective and attitude. Religious schools might prepare champions to advance their particular faith or tribe, with an outpouring of parochial empathy but withholding empathy for outgroups or others.

Greed was an operating principle of the first three industrial revolutions. The first one was sparked by James Watt’s 1776 invention of the steam engine, the second by Thomas Edison’s 1879 incandescent light bulb, and the third in the 1990s with digital electronics and information technology. Adam Smith (1776), the “father of capitalism,” argued that people naturally pursue their own self-interests and yet an invisible hand invariably leads them to do good for society, without intending it, without knowing it. Good intentions and grace are cardinal principles in any religion but disregarded by Smith. As long as economic production increased, it mattered not if this was due to avarice. A century later, Charles Darwin’s seminal research was widely interpreted as proclaiming survival of the fittest, a perspective that promoted winner-take-all competitiveness. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1930) asserted that men are driven by their libido and aggression, not to love their

neighbor but “to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.” An understanding grew that economic activity and the markets are governed by the “animal spirit” of entrepreneurs and investors in a dog-eat-dog world.

Following World War II, the United States assumed the mantle of global leadership and captaincy of spreading the free market system. From Manhattan’s skyscrapers, Ayn Rand presented her views in books such as *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1961) which spread like wildfire at Wall Street. Selfishness and greed became the bedrock of the system, while empathy was tossed away as a sentiment that belonged to socialism. In his book, *Against Empathy*, Yale University’s Paul Bloom (2016) made a case for rational compassion by arguing that empathy as an emotion distorts judgment and can lead to immoral decisions. Why did empathy become dangerous and unwise? Ishaq (2013) explained that old theories color views of reality and could condition mental habits so pervasively that they form a veil to which even scholars become so accustomed that they forget it is there.

Selfishness and self-interest have led to many tragedies, from slavery and genocides of native peoples to colonialism and appropriation. These old mindsets are as irrelevant today as factory education to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Business Roundtable released in August 2019 a new statement signed by 181 U.S. CEOs of the Purpose of a Corporation as one that promotes “an economy that serves all Americans.” This declaration debunked the views expressed by Milton Friedman in his 1962 book, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Friedman declared that “the use of the cloak of social responsibility, and the nonsense spoken in its name by influential and prestigious businessmen, does clearly harm the foundations of a free

society,” because “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits.”

Will artificial intelligence serve all Americans? Yes, by enhancing human creative potential and improving human decision-making. But human-level (or “general”) AI poses not just a promise but also peril. Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla and SpaceX, called AI humanity’s “biggest existential threat” and compared it to “summoning the demon” in a talk at MIT in 2014. The legendary late physicist Stephen Hawkins at the Web Summit in Lisbon in 2017 said that “success in creating effective AI, could be the biggest event in the history of our civilization. Or the worst. We just don’t know. So we cannot know if we will be infinitely helped by AI, or ignored by it and side-lined, or conceivably destroyed by it.” Bill Gates, at a Stanford University symposium in March 2019, warned, “the world hasn’t had that many technologies that are both promising and dangerous—you know, we had nuclear energy and nuclear weapons.” Jeff Bezos, at the George W. Bush Presidential Center’s Forum on Leadership in April 2019, stated that “I think autonomous weapons are extremely scary” and added, “some of the ideas that people have for these weapons, are in fact very scary.”

Once AI-powered robots surpass humans as the most intelligent beings on earth, will they feel grateful to humans for inventing them? Not “if we haven’t figured out how to imbue it with empathy,” warns Friend (2018), who covers Silicone Valley for *The New Yorker*. Writing for the World Economic Forum, IBM’s Mantas (2019) postulates that “empathy, our species survival tactic, is the clue to our next evolution.” To avoid more calamities and make the new revolution successful for people and the planet, empathy must be its operating principle. Empathy could be the invisible hand that turns markets into communities, engaging and benefitting everyone,

not just a few. Empathy requires outside-the-box thinking that comes from creativity. Studies by Carozzi et al. (1995) and Cross et al. (2012) have found the relationship between empathy and creativity to be mutually reinforcing. A virtuous cycle can begin which amplifies the benefits of both creativity and empathy.

Theory of Change

The International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) employs the power of the arts to cultivate creativity and grow empathy since creativity and empathy are both rooted in the arts. The arts offer an effective and least-cost intervention to groom creative-empaths. Artmaking is a powerful channel accessible to all for free expression and flight of imagination. Mural-making can foster co-imagination and co-creation—building blocks for collaborative innovation. Since 1997, ICAF has served American children as their national arts organization and the world’s children as their global arts organization.

For school children’s creative development, ICAF organizes the Arts Olympiad, a school art program that has grown into the world’s largest, in part because it is free of charge. The Arts Olympiad engages students ages 8 to 12 to empower them to overcome the well-documented “4th-grade slump” in children’s creativity. This slump was discovered by Torrance (1968), who is widely regarded as “the father of creativity.” Through structured lesson plans, the Arts Olympiad motivates students to revise their self-image by introducing them to the *Artist-Athlete Ideal* of the creative mind and healthy body (*mente sana in corpo sano*). This ideal awakens the dormant “inner artist” or the slumbering “inner athlete” in students. Students’ revised self-image solidifies when they visualize themselves as artist-athletes and depict this in their artwork. As the number of artist-

athletes grows, a school becomes a more integrated, creative, and healthy community.

To inspire schoolchildren to engage in sport is a side benefit of the Arts Olympiad. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, childhood obesity is on the rise in the United States where one in five 12- to 19-year-olds are obese and almost one in ten are extremely obese. Another benefit of the Arts Olympiad is the development of mutual empathy between student-athletes and student-artists. School art competitions result in the selection of the Arts Olympiad winners in U.S. school districts and in participating countries. These winners come together in Washington, D.C. for a week at the World Children's Festival, which includes a three-day public celebration of "Creativity, Diversity, and Unity" held at The National Mall. Free and open to the public, the WCF at the Mall is expected to attract more than 10,000 attendees.

The WCF is designed as a transformative experience that infuses students' creativity with empathy, so they become creative-empaths. Developing mutual empathy in children from diverse social backgrounds and cultures is not as easy as growing compassion in a school where students come from the same neighborhood and may have much in common. It is far more difficult to develop empathy between American students and those from countries unfriendly or between students from two neighboring countries in conflict. Language can impose constraints also, particularly for the delegates who do not speak English, thus presenting an opportunity to test whether the arts can serve as a universal language.

Creative-empaths

The WCF is curated as an intervention to infuse creativity with empathy. Artmaking turns the appearance of the

intervention into a "maker event" where young delegates express themselves, share their visions, and make learning visible. The setting of the global community whets global consciousness and enhances global competencies. Empathy workshops and leadership training prepare young delegates as global citizens (Ishaq, 2018). They realize they can intuit past the material boundaries, social schisms, and political polarization that exaggerate differences. They become inspired to actively seek and choose to experience empathy, and grow it together with their creativity.

On the WCF's first day, the young delegates convene in a large conference room, unaccompanied by their parents, guardians or teachers. The programming to disrupt the transgenerational transmission of fear, trauma, and hatred starts with art therapy sessions to help the children overcome the past by opening their minds to the opportunities ahead. Sorted into pairs, they draw each other's portraits and come to realize they are more alike than unlike. They learn that it is their right to be creative and empathic and that it is wrong to think otherwise. They are a special generation because they are responsible for shaping the Fourth Industrial Revolution for generations to come because human-level AI is projected to arrive by 2050 when they are running the show. A fellow feeling develops, which can motivate them to form a new tribe of their own—the young creative-empaths of the world.

Now ICAF must gain their trust. When the young delegates arrive at the National Mall, what they observe is something they have not seen before. The WCF is staged and emceed by youngsters like them who are also hosting their own workshops for peer-to-peer learning. Only students and school groups are allowed to perform on the "World Stage." It is their masterpieces on exhibit at the National Mall. This recognition creates a familiarity that gives them ownership of the WCF.

They realize that this is their celebration, and they are in control. The three-day WCF begins with “Health & Environment Day,” where their common concerns build a foundation for mutual empathy. Next is the “Creativity & Imagination Day,” when they learn how to grow their imagination and foster their creativity throughout their lives. Lastly, on “Peace & Leadership Day,” they learn about conflict resolution, the building of peace, and the qualities of leadership. Following the festivities, the WCF Awards Banquet is held to honor the young delegates. At this celebration of the future, they confer on supporters and educators the World Children’s Award—the first such honor bestowed on adults by the world’s children.

Expected Outcome

When the young delegates go back into the world as creative-empaths, they are motivated and trained to work together for the greater good. The changes they bring, small or large, can become a part of young peoples’ grassroots movement to democratize and spread creativity and empathy. Parents and teachers change their perspectives and outlooks as well, a result of young-to-adult learning. The iconic works that the young delegates collaboratively produce and the WCF video clips when shared by people amplify the WCF’s impact by engaging hundreds of thousands of young worldwide. A new generation of creative-empaths becomes a powerful force for the Fourth Industrial Revolution to ensure sustainability, shared prosperity, and a peaceful future.

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