

Creativity and education

Trevor Phillips,
Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

There are only two things that matter in the 21st-century world: one is whether we can live with our planet; the other is whether we can live with each other.

On a planet that could one day be home to up to nine billion people, there's plenty of space – as long as a decent proportion of us develop gills or learn to live on dirty air. Otherwise we have two tools to cope with the frictions that come from competition for water, energy and food, and the frictions that go hand in hand with differences of race, religion, gender and tribe.

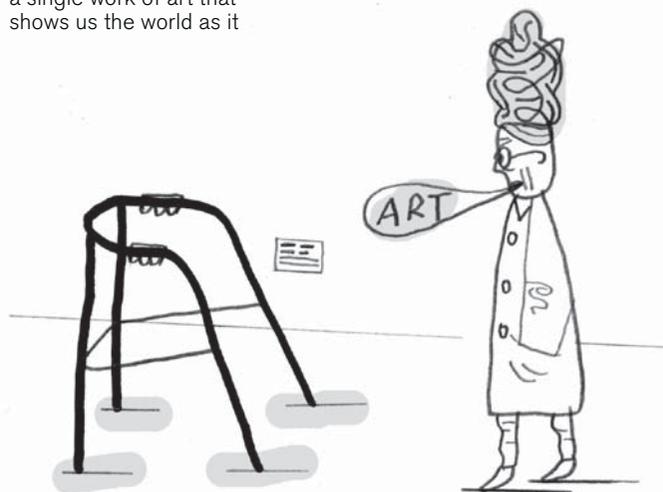
Language is the only way we can negotiate our differences. In the task of managing our resources, we need to speak to each other persuasively,

innovatively and charmingly. Words can be the bricks that build bridges between us. They can also become the grenades that leave us glaring at each other across the abyss, often speechless with anger at each other. Often this is the space in which artists, poets and musicians work in a higher, more creative idiom. Think of Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

But true integration of our humanity isn't, in the final analysis, about managing for today. It's about inspiring for tomorrow. The work of the imagination is what most matters. Not a hundred laws, nor a thousand speeches, nor a million marchers can ever match the impact of a single work of art that shows us the world as it

might be, rather than as it is. Every child who has ever read *To Kill A Mockingbird*, or any adult who has been moved by *Schindler's List* doesn't need to read the many hundreds of clauses of the Equality Act to know what's right and what's wrong. One of the best decisions I ever made was to invest public money in *East is East* – a play which revealed more about what our Asian neighbours were really like than many years of worthy articles and documentaries made by people like, er, me.

Law and politics can do a lot to prevent people doing bad things. Creative work is what we turn to if we want folks to do the things that make life worth living.



Creative learning for life, money, and love: Yes, but first and foremost for the old

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At present, almost half of the younger generation of Spain has no hope of finding an appropriate professional occupation. The situation is developing along similar lines in other European countries. It is no longer just the usual dropouts who lack any prospect of economic prosperity, but also an increasing number of well-educated middle-class youngsters. The alarming result: personal humiliation and a collective waste of resources.

Most of these European youngsters passed through quite traditional forms of education: a purgatory of nerve-racking waiting, absorbing and repeating. The privileged few became acquainted with new ways of creative teaching and learning. They kept their curiosity and their appetite for new experiences in a world that – so they were promised – would welcome them and would be eager to make use of their uniqueness.

They now find themselves unexpectedly in a one-way street removed from public attention. Here they are free to remain silent or to play creatively with their toes. It will not change anything as long as their reactions to involuntary exclusion do not disturb the daily life of those

who take advantage of the increasing impenetrability between generations.

What might 'creative learning' mean for them? Maybe it will no longer mean education – not even a different vision of education – when, eventually, the reaction of society is: 'We do not need you', or even, 'We do not want you'. More likely, their 'use of creativity' will lead to an outbreak of their frustrations, their desperation, and also their anger, in a way that the public cannot avoid noticing.

The adults of today in the corridors of power are equipped with a high level of education, unleashing a remarkable degree of 'creativity' in defence of their 'well-earned' privileges. But through their actions, they increasingly demonstrate that societies cannot go on in the same way as they have tried throughout the last 20 or 30 years – economically, politically, socially or culturally.

As a first reaction, opinion leaders demand that more 'creativity' be stimulated within the next generation. But with this one-sided plea, they are burdening the youngsters with at least two unbearable weights: one is to assign to them the task of finding creative solutions for

the problems that a more or less creatively educated adult generation has produced with quite sophisticated instruments (and has so far massively failed to solve). The other is to place full responsibility on young people to find creative solutions for a new, more integrated cross-generational contract that should nevertheless maintain the privileges of the languid but powerful old.

This won't work: it will lead to violence.

To avoid new conflicts the only chance is to change our perspective. In this view, stimulating the 'creativity' of youngsters is not the problem at all; they are creative by nature. But how can they realise their creative capacities within the existing frameworks of adulthood? The problem is the 'non-creativity' of those adults who have something to lose and therefore fear the full potential of the youngsters.

To them I address my recommendation: let us develop 'creative learning programmes' for adults to give the creativity of the youngsters a chance.