



Researching International and Contemporary Education

Thinking Education under Global Connectivity and Crises

RICE 2023–2024 Speaker Series

Dr. Mario Di Paolantonio

**“Education and Democracy at the End:
The foreclosing of the transgenerational sense of education”**



While the “crisis of thinking” has been rehearsed throughout the destitution and horrors of 20th century, there is a different accent on the catastrophic today. The current eclipse of thinking besetting the public is symptomatic of a time marked by multiple planetary catastrophes, political-social impasses, and a surge of psychic-social maladies arising from the techno-economic overstimulation of the nervous system. These forces are aligning together with a never-before-seen world-defying ferocity. My paper is concerned with exploring what is at stake in the very possibility of education in these unnerving times, particularly for an education that can give us *the time and place to think*: to think profoundly and trans-generationally about our thought-provoking times. While education might be well placed to attune our senses and spark the thinking necessary to respond to the world, this paper grapples with how this potential is presently inflected by the logics of neoliberalism, resulting in a form of *cruel optimism* in education.

Central to my discussion is thus a critical consideration of how the predominant sense of “optimism” in education, which encourages individuals to continuously innovate and enhance themselves through perpetual learning, works against our common hope and collective striving for what is *educational* in education. At issue is how the transgenerational hope inherent in education, which plays a pivotal role in nurturing educational sensibilities and a thoughtful regard for the world, is being displaced by the prevailing neoliberal emphasis on the hyper-individualized learner. Through an examination of the normalization of the entrepreneurial learner, who views education as an investment for personal success to survive the existing economic uncertainty, we encounter a figure that largely remains aloof, lonely, and alarmingly indifferent (thoughtless) to their involvement in the broader transgenerational temporal implications of “passing on” that education affords.

In the final part of the paper, I turn to engage the depictions of neoliberalism’s figures and wastelands as portrayed by the late Japanese artist Tetsuya Ishida. Through a reading of select pieces of his artwork, I contemplate the general malaise and anguish felt by the younger generations, who have been ruthlessly subjected to the prevailing “cruel optimism” that characterizes our era. Like artists following the social realist tradition of the previous century, who bore witness to the struggles and afflictions faced by workers in the industrial age, Ishida serves as a witness to the harrowing realities of a novel form of capitalism that has fundamentally transformed both human sensibilities and its surroundings. Although Ishida’s body of work doesn’t offer any facile hope, as we’ll explore, in certain images he gestures to the buoyancy and life affirming potential of “passing on” a worldly repertoire that can spark a thoughtful regard, even in the direst of situations.

Mario Di Paolantonio is an Associate Professor of philosophy of education in the Faculty of Education, York University, Toronto. His international award-winning research explores how memorial sites attempt to pedagogically reckon with historical wrongs. Professor Di Paolantonio is an International Research Associate at the Centro de Estudios en Pedagogías Contemporáneas and the Escuela de Humanidades at the *Universidad Nacional de San Martín (UNSAM)*, Buenos Aires, Argentina. He publishes in the area of philosophy of education, cultural theory, social and political thought, and memory studies. His recently published book is entitled, *Education and Democracy at The End: The Crisis of Sense*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.

Thursday, March 7, 2024

9:30 – 10:45 am

Community Room (FEB 1139)

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