

# Welcome to RIThink

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We are happy to introduce **RIThink**—the multidisciplinary, online magazine of the Rochester Institute of Technology’s American College of Management and Technology. In offering a multidisciplinary approach to scholarship here, we hope to break away from the trend of narrowly specialized journals in the firm belief that creativity is about making connections, about imagining how things might come together differently. This approach, we think, is congruent with ideas that are part of the current discourse in higher education about the nature of learning.

Education has changed a lot since the end of the Industrial Age. What we commonly call “traditional education” was in many respects an outgrowth of the historical demands of that previous age to democratize the masses through education. In that model, education might be said to resemble a production line: students were sorted and grouped into classes and classrooms; specialists did their work to shape each part of the product; and the final assemblage of basic skills and knowledge—defined by the student’s ability to reproduce memorized content—was the finished product, an education. Disciplinary knowledge was a touch-stone of the Industrial Age: only highly specialized professors could perform the fine-tuning necessary to assemble, piece by piece, the final educational product. Educational success was defined by the ability of the student to perform basic tasks: do the windshield wipers work? Yes. Do the doors open and close smoothly? Check. The American historian Henry Adams, in his prescient autobiography, *The Education of Henry Adams*, pointed out the limitations of Industrial Age thinking: “Nothing in education is so astonishing as the amount of ignorance it accumulates in the form of inert facts.”

The advent of the Information Age led to new ways of thinking about education. Since facts were only a *google* away, the emphasis shifted from memorizing information to understanding how to contextualize it, to shape its use in ways that generated new meanings and applications. Traditional

classroom spaces with face to face contact were transformed into virtual spaces with point to point contact. Literacy, previously defined by books and writing was redefined as multi-modal communication, incorporating written, visual and aural dimensions within a virtual environment. If *specialization*, *individual mastery*, and *facts* were the totem words of the old, Industrial Age model of higher education, *connectivity*, *collaboration*, and *critical thinking* have become the bywords of the new model. Why this shift in educational emphasis? Because the force that drives the Information Age is *innovation*—looking at existing systems and structures and asking how they can be understood differently, how they can be changed for other uses to fit an existing need or meet a need that is to come. In the new society, knowledge makes things happen.

Global education is a natural outgrowth of this changing environment. Connectivity crosses national boundaries and traditionally defined spaces leading us to encounters with others and a reencounter with ourselves. Images, texts, voices reach out to us transforming our thinking, challenging our assumptions, altering our perspectives. The dynamic of global education is inter-relatedness, our shared fate as a planet, giving multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary thinking a new and crucial emphasis in the scholarly life. In such a milieu, a multidisciplinary approach to education assumes that relationships matter—between people, between cultures, between the disciplines themselves. It presupposes that the language of the scholar is not a secret language of specialists but a shared language of thinkers. A multidisciplinary approach crosses the boundaries to redefine the boundaries of knowledge itself as *collaborative*.

We don't want to place too fine a point on the differences between Industrial Age and Information Age approaches to higher education; education is by nature conservative in its approach, and what we have before us at the present is a hybrid of methods and good intentions. This is particularly evident for those educators who work in a global setting. We should never forget that when we say the Industrial Age has ended what we really mean is that it has ended in the West. The East and South are at the beginning of their own industrial ages, with their own historical and cultural demands and with their own potentially frightening consequences for people and planet. It would be nice to predict how education will impact this brave new world, but we do not know enough about our present to predict our future. In this regard, education is no different than any other human endeavor—it is always running to catch up with what has already happened.