

Conference at O.C.N.

Overschooled but Undereducated

How to get the balance right

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Some learning experiences... for all

- the dawn of the day
- the ebb and flow of the tide
- the opening of a flower
- strength and fragility
- conformity and protest
- permanence and transience

Tell me, and I forget;
show me, and I remember;
let me do and I understand.

To MEANDER... To follow a winding course; to wander aimlessly.

A MEANDER (geographic term)... A bend in a winding river, resulting from helicoidal flow.

HELICOIDAL... A movement of water like a corkscrew, eroding from one side, and building up on the other; a natural process of adjusting to constantly changing conditions.

The Danish Nobel winning Physicist, Neils Bohr, understood this as he remonstrated with a PhD student... “You’re not thinking, you’re just being logical”.

HELICOIDAL THINKING ... is dynamic; instantly reacting to changing circumstances. Over hundreds of thousands of generations the human brain has come to work in such a natural, dynamic, meandering way.

So this lecture will, for very good reasons, be a “meander”... taking ideas from one place and building them up in another in response to changing circumstances, and creating new meaning.

The Creation Story (Part 1)

To demonstrate how late the human species arrived on Earth the environmentalist David Brower in the 1990s devised an ingenious narrative by compressing the age of the planet into the six days of the Biblical creation story.

In this scenario Earth is created on Sunday at midnight. Life in the form of the first bacterial cells appears on Tuesday morning around 8:00am, and for the next two and half days the microcosm evolves. By Thursday at midnight it is fully established. On Friday around 4:00pm, the microorganisms invent sexual reproduction, and on Saturday, the last day of creation all the visible forms of life evolve.

Around 1:30am on Saturday the first marine animals are formed, and by 9:30am the first plants come ashore, followed two hours later by amphibians and insects. At 10 minutes before five in the afternoon the great reptiles appear, roam the earth in lush tropical forests for five hours and then suddenly die around 9:45pm.

The Creation Story (part 2)

Shortly before 10:00pm some tree-dwelling mammals in the tropics evolve into the first primates. An hour later some of those evolve into monkeys; and around 11:40pm the great apes appear. Eight minutes before midnight the first Southern apes stand up and walk on two legs.

Five minutes later they disappear again. The first human species, Homo Habilis, appears four minutes before midnight, evolves into Homo Erectus half a minute later and into archaic forms Homo Sapiens 30 seconds before midnight.

The Neanderthals command Europe and Asia from 15 to 4 seconds before midnight. The modern human species, finally, appears in Africa 11 seconds before midnight and in Europe five seconds before midnight. Written human history begins around two-thirds of a second before midnight.

Story is paraphrased from Fritjof Capra
The Web of Life, 1996

The Descent of Man

Studies in genetics suggest that the split with the Great Apes occurred seven million years ago. At twenty years to a generation that is three hundred and fifty thousand generations ago.

In all that time the genetic structure of us humans differs from the Great Apes by less than 2%.

Three hundred and fifty thousand generations is, at a minute a generation, equivalent to the number of minutes we are, on average, awake for in a year.

See Before the Dawn: Recovering the lost history of our ancestors
by Nicholas Wade, an Englishman and Science Correspondence for the *New York Times*

Psalm 8: Verses 3-5

When I consider your heavens,
The work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
Which you have set in place.

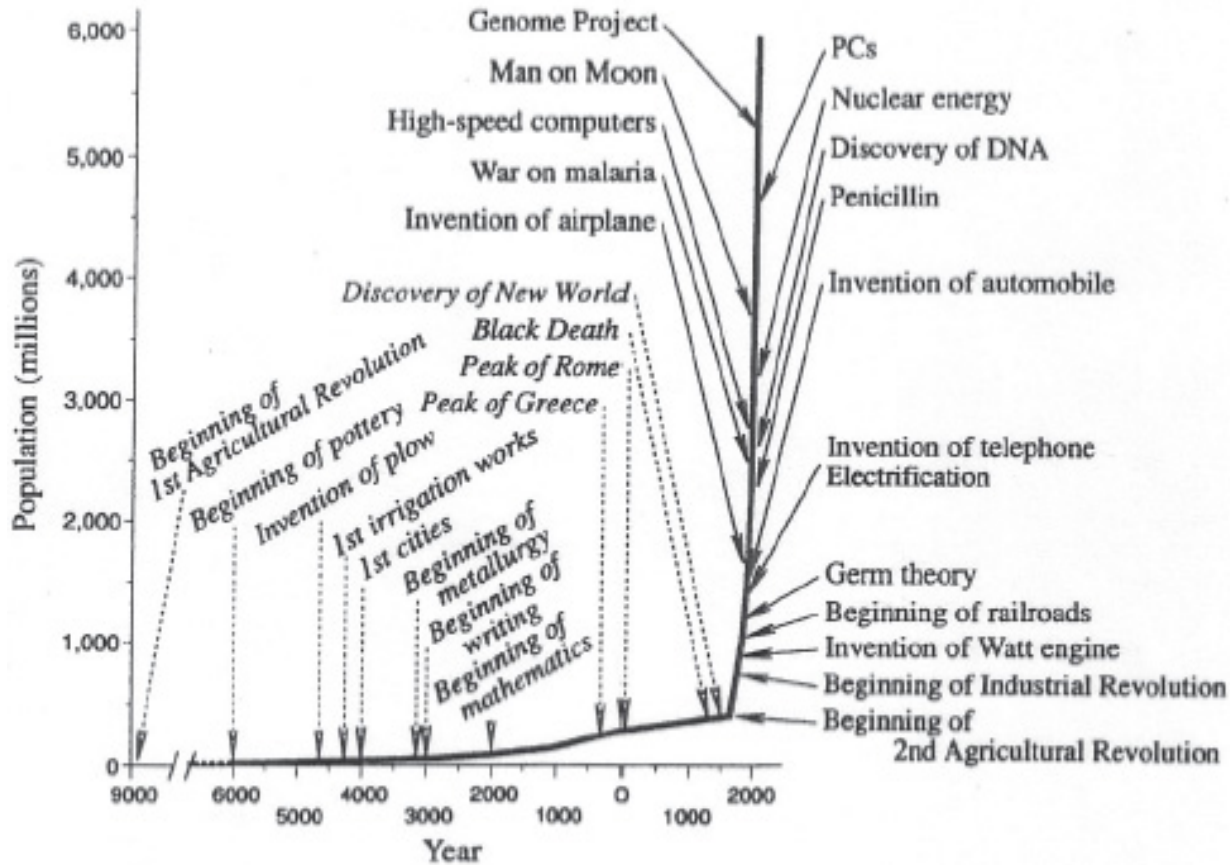
What is man that you are mindful of him,

The son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him little lower than the angels

And crowned him with glory and honour.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS, AND POLITICAL CRISES



Spirituality

"Mystical, symbolic and religious thinking all those ways of thinking that the rationalist would condemn as "irrational" - seem to characterize human thinking everywhere and at every time. It is as if there was some adaptive advantage to such modes of thinking that offers benefits that rationality can not provide. Perhaps the advantages that irrational, speculative, and religious beliefs offer through their ability to spur us to actions with positive consequences are significant enough to account for our propensity towards their adoption. Extraterrestrial robots who are completely rational might evolve very slowly indeed."

John D. Barrow
The Artful Universe, 1996

“We have not inherited this world from our parents, we have been loaned it by our children”

January 1st 2000

The BBC interviewer was questioning Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal and later President of the Royal Society; “Tell us, what chance do you give the world of surviving the next thousand years, the next millennium?”

I’m not sure about the next millennium but I think I give us a 50/50 chance of surviving the next hundred years. I fear that the speed of man’s technological discoveries is outpacing our wisdom and ability to control what we have discovered... What happens here on Earth, in this century, will conceivably make the difference between a near eternity filled with evermore complex and subtle forms of life, and one filled with nothing but base matter”.

Our Final Century: A scientist’s warning
Sir Martin Rees, 2003

“If civilisation is to survive, it must live on the interest, not the capital, of nature. Ecological markers suggest that in the early 1960’s, humans were using 70% of nature’s yearly output; by the early 1980’s we’d reached 100%; and in 1999 we were at 125%.

Ronald Wright
A Short History of Progress 2004

I believe that we have little chance of averting an environmental catastrophe unless we recognise that we are not the masters of Being, but only a part of Being... We must recognise that we are related to the world as a whole and to eternity. Only people with a sense of responsibility for the world, and to the world, are truly responsible to, and for, themselves.

The Art of the Impossible by Vaclav Havel
Quoted in *The Dignity of Difference* by Jonathan Sacks, 2002

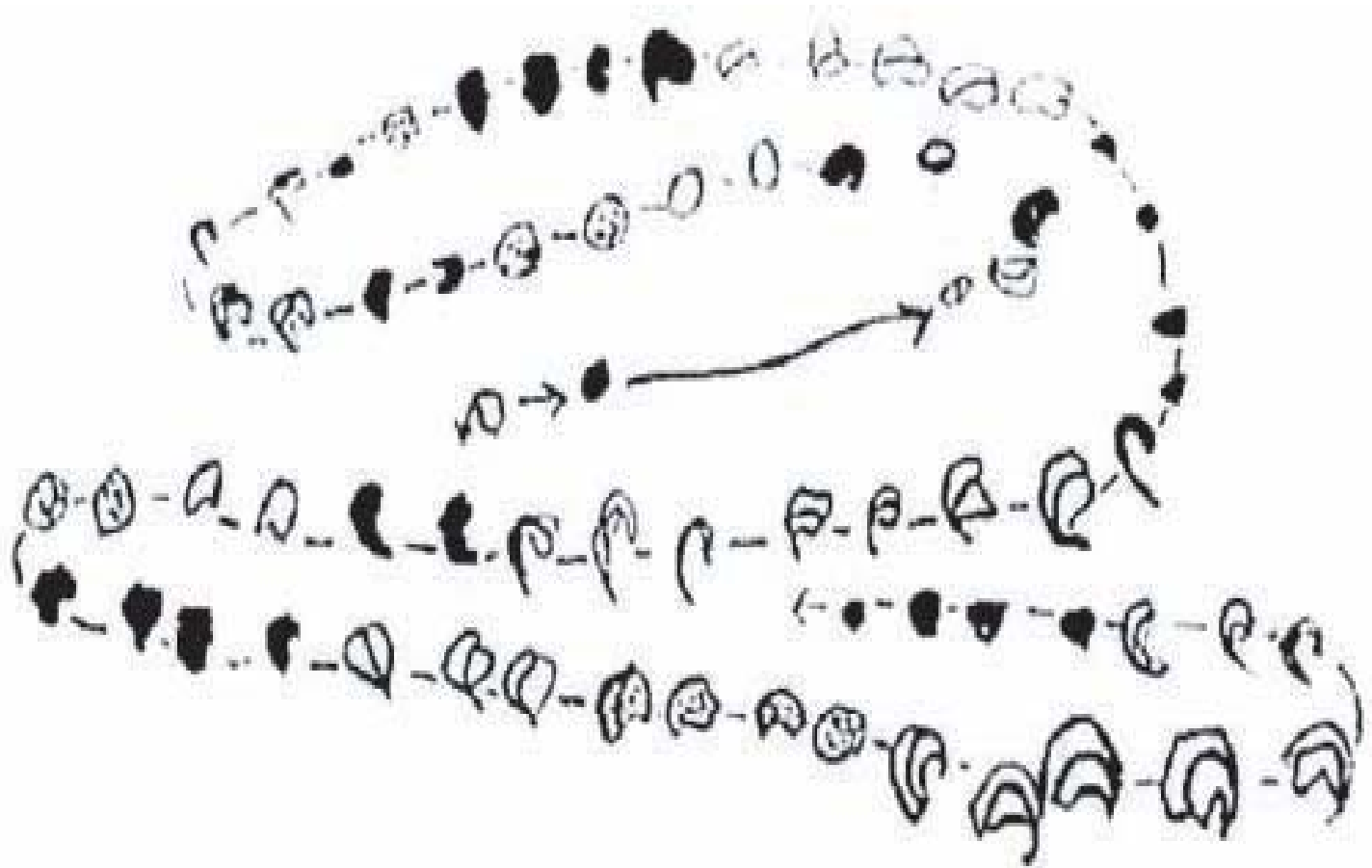
My usual lecture title is:

“What kind of Education for
what kind of world? Do you want
children to grow up as Battery
Hens of Free-range Chickens?”

The human race is the planet's pre-eminent learning species – it is our brains that give us our superiority, not our muscles.

Why, therefore, do we have a “crisis” in how we bring up young people? What has gone wrong?

In our search for new ideas, what lessons from our past might we have forgotten?



“Learning is a
consequence of
thinking”

Education is what remains after
you have forgotten everything
you ever learnt in school

Mark Twain, and many others

Oh God, oh my God, how I suffered. What torments and humiliations I experienced. I was told that because I was a mere boy I had to obey my teachers in everything. I was sent to school. I did not understand what I was taught, and was beaten for my ignorance. I never found out what use my education was supposed to be.

I learned most not
from those who taught
me but from those
who talked with me.

St. Augustine, 6th Century

“Learning... a reflective activity which enables the learner to draw upon previous experience to understand and evaluate the present, so as to shape future action and formulate new knowledge”.

"The test of a successful education is not the amount of knowledge that a pupil takes away from a school, but his appetite to know and his capacity to learn. If the school sends out children with the desire for knowledge and some idea of how to acquire it and use it, it will have done its work. Too many leave school with the appetite killed and the mind loaded with undigested lumps of information. The good schoolmaster is known by the number of valuable subjects that he declines to teach."

Sir Richard Livingstone, *"The Future in Education,"*
C.U.P., 1941

What was your most powerful learning experience?

How did this shape the way you think about your own learning?

Traditionally, Education has often been likened to a three-legged stool, which will always adjust to the most uneven surface (unlike a four-legged chair)

The Home – emotions

The Community – inspiration

The School – intellectual

You can't bring up children to be intelligent in a world that is not intelligible to them. Streets that are unsafe for children to play in are as much a measure of failed educational policy as are burnt out teachers and decaying classrooms

The Paradox of Wealth

(the Faustian Bargain of the twenty-first century)

“Most of us are earning more money and living better than we (or our parents) did a quarter of a century ago when computers were invented to take drudgery out of work. You’d think, therefore, that it would be easier, not harder, to attend to the part of our lives that exists outside paid work. Yet by most measures we’re working longer and more frantically than before, and the time and energy for our non-working lives are evaporating.”

from The Future of Success; Robert Reich, 1991

In *The Future of Work*, (1984) Professor Charles Handy noted that, in the early 1900s, industrial workers laboured for about 100,000 hours in a lifetime (47 hours a week, for 47 weeks in a year, for 47 years). This, he noted, had already dropped to about 75,000 hours in the early 1980s. He predicted that it would likely fall to a 50,000 hour lifetime of labour by the early 1990s, with most people working a 32 hour week for 45 weeks in a year for 35 years.

What went wrong with his predictions?

Going ever faster... but to where?

In 2003 oil geologist Kenneth Deffreyes predicted that he was “99% confident” that global oil production would peak in 2004. In August 2004 Texan oil baron T. Boone Pickens announced: “Never again will we pump more than 82 million barrels [a day]”.

George Monbiot, 24th August 2004-08-31

“China’s farmers cannot feed hungry cities,” with grain production falling in every year since 1998 as more agricultural land is used by industry in support of a 9% annual growth in the economy. In the first six months of this year food imports surged 62%, leading to a 30% increase in the future price of grain.

Jonathan Watts in Beijing, 26th August 2004

The story of October 2008

The Credit Crunch, collapse of the
stock market and the imminent
recession...

We cannot think of schooling in isolation from the many other changes in our social structures.

- Global Warming
- The Market Economy, and globalisation
- Demographics, and the beginning of the pension crisis
- The Spiritual issue – “What is life all about?”
- The Communication Revolution
- The Sexual Revolution, and its impact on the family
- The creation of a Sustainable World/Economy
- The Nature of Work, and Human Dignity
- The Patterns of normal Human Development

Crisis of Meaning

“The biggest crisis we are facing is a Crisis of Meaning. The tremendous social changes of the last 100 years have stripped modern society of that which gives us meaning be it in our roots to our ancestors, religions, spirituality, our relationship to nature... Within this Crisis of Meaning our young people are facing a MORAL crisis - a crisis of values. Without these anchors young people no longer understand the value of perseverance, learning for learning’s sake etc.. Instead our daily lives are filled with a pursuit of money and temporary ecstasy. Both of these goals are unfulfillable and result in a misguided frenzy in the pursuit of the next thrill, or in depression.”

E-mail from Dr Rolando Jubis
Psychologist and Counselor
Jakarta International School, 11/11/00

“You don’t have to go into the dark, but if you want to see the stars in all their glory you have to dare to go deep into the desert, away from the light pollution of civilisation. Only then, when your eyes become acclimatised to real darkness, can you begin to appreciate the sheer brilliance of the stars. Then, and only then, will you see which way to go.”

Conference of Headteachers from the Middle East
Dubai, January 2003

Before the lights begin to dim

Or

Where have all the story-tellers gone?

Ottawa, March 2006

Ethics and Stories

Humans share their imaginations and bond with one another through the stories they tell. A story is to human growth as a fact is to science, mathematics is to physics, or poetry is to the human spirit. Myths are a special kind of story. They capture and express realities that cannot be put directly into words and shared in any other way.

Stories are the platform on which a nation floats.

Whatever the source of ethics, we humans are by our nature ethics-seeking creatures; language, stories, and myths are the tools we use to identify and articulate the ethics we find.

Margaret Somerville

The Ethical Imagination; Journeys of the Human Spirit; 2006

“What a piece of work is Man!

How noble in reason!

How infinite in faculty.

In form, in moving how express and admirable.

In action how like an angel,

In apprehension how like a god;

“The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!”

Hamlet, to Horatio in the graveyard

(Humans are one of only two species of mammals that actually go out with the intention of killing other members of their species)

“Learning about Human Learning” — The emergence of a new Synthesis Drawn from several disciplines

1. Philosophy, and later pedagogy
2. Evolutionary Theory
3. Psychology (Behaviourism)
4. Cognitive Science (Metacognition)
5. Neurobiology
6. Evolutionary Psychology
7. Anthropology and Archaeology
8. Genetics
9. Values (philosophy, purpose); Nature via Nurture

Synthesis



Nature via Nurture

Our bodies and minds are not of recent origin. They are the direct consequence of millions of years of surviving in Africa and adapting to the dramatic changes this continent has seen in the course of the last five million years. Africa has shaped not only our physical bodies, but the societies within which we live. The way we interact today at a social and cultural level is in many ways the result of organisational skills developed by our hominid ancestors in Africa over millions of years.

Cradle of Humankind

Brett Hilton-Barber and Lee R. Berger, South Africa, 2002

“You can take Man out of the Stone Age, but you can’t take the Stone Age out of Man.”

Nigel Nicholson, Harvard Business Review

July / August 1998

Out of Africa (1)

Learning to stand upright, and coming to terms with big brains

1. Inquisitiveness
2. Predispositions
3. The brain as a Survival Mechanism (Cain, the farmer, killed his brother Abel, the itinerant shepherd)... e.g. the Hadza
4. ... only those who could make ‘good’ decisions lived to tell the tale

Out of Africa (2)

Life as Hunter/Gatherers

1. Difference in male/female vision
2. Difference in male/female language
3. Difference in male/female behaviour*
4. Emergence of collaborative/competitive strategies**
5. Story-telling, and the use of moral tales***

* When faced with a crisis male psychologists have taught that the natural reaction is fight, or flight. A new generation of female psychologists suggests from their perspective that the response to a crisis is bend, or befriend.

** The significance of group size especially 12, and 150.

*** “The lives of nations as with individuals, are lived largely in the imagination”... Enoch Powell

Out of Africa (3)

Mitochondria, and the skeleton found in Cheddar

1. The Significance of Kissing and the nature of reproduction
2. Epigenetics, and the problem of learned helplessness
3. A confused species: Driven to Acquire, to Bond, to Learn and to Defend (Lawrence and Nohria)
4. The significance of altruism

Altruism

- **Freud** argued that the laws of civilisation had become an oppressive force which thwarted man's basic needs, and turned these into dangerous, psychological pathologies
- **Dawkins** thoughts on *The Selfish Gene* led to a sociological interpretation that selfishness was somehow natural, and therefore right.
- **Group Selection** is now seen as significant as selfish choices; “Selfishness beats altruism within groups; Altruistic groups beat selfish groups every time”
(Nature, 2007)

Really Out of Africa

The Great Leap Forward, the Ice Age and
the coming of adolescence

See St. Luke's Gospel, Chapter 2: 41-50

Intelligence (“The ability to behave intelligently”)

- **Behaviourism**, and the development of intelligence tests
- **Multiple intelligences...** *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner, 1983
e.g. The ability to use language, calculation, spatial relationships, understanding of rhythm, physical awareness, introspection, and social awareness. To which was added later a natural, or spiritual, intelligence.
- ***Five Minds for the Future*** (2006):
 - The Disciplined Mind
 - The Synthesising mind
 - The Creative mind
 - The Respectful mind
 - The Ethical mind

Knowing all this, what should we now do?

Two questions...

- Can the learning species fit into school?
- Are we educating for future pilgrims, or for customers?

A Recap:

“As we build networks and patterns of synaptic connections when we are very young, so we build the framework which will ‘shape’ how we learn as we get older; such ‘shaping’ will significantly determine what we learn – it will be both an opportunity, and a constraint.

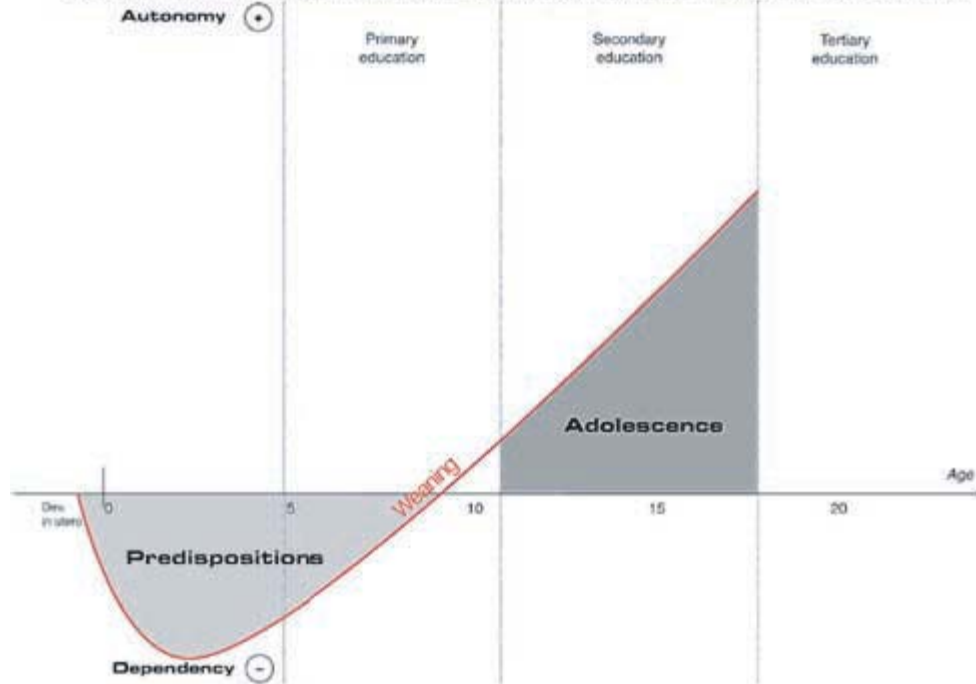
The broader and more diverse the experience when very young, the greater are the chances that, later in life, the individual will be able to handle open, ambiguous, uncertain and novel situations.”

The Neural Basis of Cognitive Development: A Constructivist Manifesto“
by Stephen J. Quartz and Terrence Sejnowski, The Salk Institute, San Diego, California

“Edelman's model of our brain as a rich, layered, messy, unplanned jungle eco-system is especially intriguing, however, because it suggests that a jungle-like brain might thrive best in a jungle-like classroom that includes many sensory, cultural, and problem layers that are closely related to the real world environment in which we live - the environment that best stimulates the neural networks that are genetically tuned to it.”

A Celebration of Neurons by Robert Sylwester, June 1995

GRAPH 2: INTELLECTUAL WEANING BASED ON NORMAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



Are Teenagers Necessary?

Modern society seems to have moved, without skipping a beat, from blaming our parents for the ills of society, to blaming our children.

For most of our history, the labours of young people in their teens was too important to be sacrificed – ‘schooling’ for teenagers remained a minority activity until well into the twentieth century. In fact teenagers can be seen to be an invention of the Machine Age. It was Roosevelt’s solution to the Depression years to take teenagers out of the jobs that could be done by formerly unemployed family men by requiring all early teenagers to attend High School. “But, for very many youngsters, High School, which virtually defines the rise of the teenagers, is hardly an exalted place”.

“The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager”

Thomas Hine, page 1-9

Crazy by Design

We have suspected that there is something going on in the brain of the adolescent, apparently involuntarily, that is forcing apart the child/parent relationship. What neurologists are discovering challenges the conventional belief held until only a year or so ago, that brain formation is largely completed by the age of twelve. Adolescence is a period of profound structural change, in fact “the changes taking place in the brain during adolescence are so profound, they may rival early childhood as a critical period of development”, wrote Barbara Strauch in 2003. “The teenage brain, far from being readymade, undergoes a period of surprisingly complex and crucial development.” The adolescent brain, she suggests, “is crazy by design.”

Adolescence

From the earliest of times the progression from dependent child to autonomous adult has been an issue of critical importance to all societies.

The adolescent brain, being “crazy by design,” could be a critical evolutionary adaptation that has built up over countless generations, and is essential to our species’ survival. It is adolescence that drives human development by forcing young people in every generation to think beyond their own self-imposed limitations and exceed their parents’ aspirations. These neurological changes in the young brain as it transforms itself means that adolescents have evolved to be apprentice-like learners, not pupils sitting at desks awaiting instruction.

Youngsters who are empowered as adolescents to take charge of their own futures will make better citizens for the future than did so many of their parents and their grandparents who suffered from being overschooled but undereducated in their own generations.

“Our society makes adolescence unduly difficult, not because it is too soft on teenagers, but because it is too hard on them. Youngsters of today are growing up in a world in which the values of mutuality and reciprocity that were once an important part of middle-class culture, have been overwhelmed by a shoulder-shrugging individualism that excuses most adults from what we used to think were our personal responsibilities to nurture and support the adolescent.

The Road to Whatever

Elliott Currie, 2004, pages 13 and 255

DON'T FENCE ME IN

(Cole Porter)

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies, Don't fence me in
Let me ride through the wide open country that I love, Don't fence me in
Let me be by myself in the evenin' breeze
And listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees
Send me off forever but I ask you please, Don't fence me in
Just turn me loose, let me straddle my old saddle
Underneath the western skies
On my Cayuse, let me wander over yonder
Till I see the mountains rise
I want to ride to the ridge where the west commences
And gaze at the moon till I lose my senses
And I can't look at hovels and I can't stand fences
Don't fence me in, no
Pop, oh don't you fence me in

Upside Down and Inside Out

A possible description of the assumption we have inherited about systems of learning, namely, that older students should be taken more seriously than younger students and that the only learning that really matters is that which is formal. *Overschooled but Undereducated* calls for these assumptions to be reversed in the light of modern understanding about how humans learn.

INTELLECTUAL WEANING (“Do it yourself”)

SUBSIDIARITY:

It is wrong for a superior to retain the right to make decisions than an inferior is already able to make for itself.

To remain a pupil is to
serve your teacher badly.

Friedrich Nietzsche
1844-1900

Political/Social Inertia

“Much to my surprise I can't really fault your theory. You are probably educationally right; certainly your argument is ethically correct.

But the system you're arguing for would require very good teachers. We're not convinced that there will ever be enough good teachers. So, instead, we're going for a teacher-proof system of organising schools - that way we can get a uniform standard.”

Verbatim report of conclusions of presentation
made to the Policy Unit at Downing Street in March 1996

How things have changed

- “In our concentration on academic performance we lose sight of our main business of educating human personality”. (TES 1959)
- All considerations of the curriculum should consider how best to use subjects for the purpose of education, rather than regarding education as the bi-product of the efficient teaching of subjects”. (Sir Philip Morris, 1952)
- “Until education is conceived as a whole process in which mind, body and soul are jointly guided towards maturity, a child’s personality will not necessarily be developed”. (The Crowther Report, 1959)

In 1962 it was claimed that seven questions had to be answered about a child's education:

1. How far has a child been able to develop its own personality?
2. Is our education an adequate preparation for becoming a good citizen?
3. Is the present system of physical education satisfactory?
4. What contribution can education make to the responsibilities in the home?
5. How effective can the school leaver communicate?
6. How skilful is a child when he leaves school?
7. How well equipped is a child when he leaves school to become a self-supporting member of the community?

Educating the Intelligent by Hutchinson and Young, 1962

“I call a complete and generous education that which equips a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously all the offices public and private of peace and war”

John Milton, 1644 As quoted in *The Child at School*, J.H. Newsom, 1948

“Manners makyth Man”

Winchester College, 1394

“Dare to be Wise”

Manchester Grammar School, 1515

Recent English Government Statements

“The work of the Department of Education and Employment fits with a new economic imperative of supply-side investment for public prosperity”. (2001)

“The goal is to improve the skills of England’s young people to create a workforce of world-class standard”. (2008)

So, Now...

Formal schooling, therefore, has to start a dynamic process through which students are progressively weaned from their dependence on teachers and institutions, and given the confidence to manage their own learning, collaborating with colleagues as appropriate, and using a range of resources and learning situations. The challenge now is for communities to begin building new organisations for learning that handle both the skills of the past and enable the understanding and coordination of constant change, life-long learning, diversity and complexity so as to prepare young people to participate in a vibrant and democratic civil society.

There aren't any
great people out
there anymore —
there's only us.

"To us the sun appears to be the largest and brightest of the stars, but it is actually the smallest and the faintest. There are many billions of galaxies in the observable universe. Our planet Earth is a puny object in a violent, unbelievably vast and expanding universe. Our very existence is a consequence of stability of the sun, which has been burning long enough to allow life to evolve and flourish on our planet. It is that violent and blazing star whose light and heat comes to us from ninety-three million miles away that makes it possible for us to sit comfortably in our homes thinking about it all".

(Continued)

“That act of thought is almost as great a miracle as the universe itself. We are a submicroscopic dot in a tiny corner of a small galaxy in a universe containing billions of galaxies, but in us the universe has become conscious, has started thinking about itself. The sun is not thinking about itself as it burns; the universe is not thinking about, is not conscious of itself as it explodes through space; but we are. Something is going on in us that is as wonderful and extraordinary as the universe itself”.

Doubts and Loves: What is left of Christianity, Richard Holloway, 2001

"This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities".

"We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that. This enables us to do something, and enables us to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end result, but that is the difference between the master builder, and the worker.

"We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not Messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

The last prayer of Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, just before he was murdered on the steps of his cathedral.

Hitherto we have been considering the uninspired teacher, who works his or her way dully and mechanically through the prescribed curriculum. But teachers may be, and frequently are, charming, intelligent, and persuasive. They may put things well; they may speak in a way that will command attention and awake emotion and enthusiasm; they may have a power of making difficulties seem easy. The child will listen to such teachers and will greatly appreciate them — particularly if he has an examination to pass in the near future. But the more accomplished a teacher is in the art of lecturing or coaching, the worse he is as an educator. Working on the old-fashioned system, the clever teacher (deplorable paradox!) does almost more harm than the stupid one. For the clever schoolmaster

makes things too easy for his pupils; he relieves them of the necessity of finding out things for themselves. By dint of brilliant teaching he succeeds in almost eliminating the learning process. He knows how to fill his pupils with ready-made knowledge, which they inevitably forget (since it is not their knowledge and cost them nothing to acquire) as soon as the examination for which it was required is safely passed. The stupid teacher, on the other hand, may be so completely intolerable that the child will perhaps be driven, despairingly and in mere self-defence, to educate himself; in which case the incompetent shepherd will have done, all unwittingly, a great service to his charge, by forcing him into a rebellious intellectual independence.

Aldous Huxley,

Social learning schools threatened by Ofsted, say critics

Schools offering alternative forms of education are under threat from a one-size-fits-all inspection regime, claim the Waldorf Steiner Schools Fellowship.

In one chapter of the book, Kevin Avison of the Waldorf Steiner Schools Fellowship, writes: “Our distinctive approach poses problems for an inspectorate directed by public policy towards ‘rigorous’ standardisation and blandishments of fickle fashions and assumed ‘best practice’.

“The education of children will not be better served by stony-faced expediency or by politically correct schools. Ofsted needs greater independence and inspectors need to become bold enough to state what they find on every level of experience, because growing and learning is not limited to tick-boxes.”

“The piling up of government initiative upon initiative and continual tampering with the inspection system is an ever-present threat to the distinctiveness of all independent schools.”

The Guardian 17/11/2008

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