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## Second Student Presentation

# OVER-SCHOOLED BUT UNDER-EDUCATED; GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

**Bulkley Valley School District  
November 16th, 2007**

Participants at this conference might also be interested in the following two articles published by the 21st Century Learning Initiative:

-  **Adolescence: A Critical evolutionary Adaptation**
-  **When will we ever Learn?**

## 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

## **Adolescence and Apprenticeship forms of learning**

Thomas Hine writing in 1999 on the rise and fall of the American teenager noted, “the principle reason high schools now enroll nearly all teenagers is that we can’t imagine what else to do with them.” That is a shocking conclusion by a man who spent years studying the issue. Modern society, by being so concerned for the well being of adults tries desperately to ignore the adolescents’ need to explore and do things for themselves, by giving them ever more to do in school. It is as if modern society is trying to outlaw adolescence by over schooling children. That is not education. There is a frightening manmade hole in the desirable experience for adolescence - there are simply not enough opportunities for them to learn from doing things for themselves in a modern society.

## **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.

# 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

“Our society makes adolescence unduly difficult, then, 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, and indeed society as a whole, from what we used to think of as the adult responsibilities of nurture and support. We now put most of the burden of managing life on children themselves and are quick to discard them altogether if they become too much trouble.”

*The Road to Whatever*  
Elliott Currie, 2004, pages 13 and 255

# INTELLECTUAL WEANING

("Do it yourself")

## SUBSIDIARITY:

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

## For further information:

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