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Saskatoon School Board Association

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

Saskatchewan

November 26th-28th, 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?**

Purpose Statement

The 21st Century Learning Initiative's essential purpose is to facilitate the emergence of new approaches to learning that draw upon a range of insights into the human brain, the functioning of human societies, and learning as a self-organizing activity. We believe this will release human potential in ways that nurture and form democratic communities worldwide, and will help reclaim and sustain a world supportive of human endeavour.

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

Chinese Proverb

Half of the 5 year olds starting school lack the speaking and listening skills needed to cope in the classroom "A cultural change means that parents no longer believed conversation was essential to their children's development," said Alan Wells, Director of the Basic Skills Agency. Describing family communication as "the daily grunt", Mr. Wells went on to say, "There is an ethos (among parents) which says 'don't worry, schools will do it all for you'".

The Independent
4th March 2003

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

“Education is the ability to perceive the hidden connections between phenomena.”

Vaclav Havel, 2000

**To remain a pupil is to serve your
teacher badly.**

Friedrich Nietzsche
1844-1900

“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

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

Why, therefore, do we have a "crisis" in education?

What has gone wrong?

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

Pregnancy and the Developing Brain

"There is no period of parenthood with a more direct and formative effect on a child's brain, than the last three months of pregnancy leading to the birth of a full term baby. The mother's emotions affect the foetus, and so do her general habits and the parent's physical environment. (Probably) half of birth defects are due to avoidable exposure to medicinal drugs, recreational drugs, alcohol, tobacco smoke, and toxic agents at work and at home."

Marian Diamond
The Magic Trees of the Mind, 1998

“Learning is a consequence of thinking”

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"We have unequivocal evidence that breast-fed children are physically stronger than nonbreast-fed children, that they have greater verbal, quantitative and memory abilities as pre-schoolers, and significantly higher I.Q. scores during their school years. This is due not simply to healthy substances in the milk, as many assume, but also to the early mother-child relationship that breast-feeding implies."

Karl Zinsmesiter,
The American Enterprise, May/June 1998

“The new middle-class world in which many American adolescents grow up is one that combines harshness and heedlessness in equal measure, a world which makes it very hard to grow up. It makes it all too difficult to achieve a strong and abiding sense of worth and all too easy to feel like a failure and a loser. It makes it all too easy to feel like an outsider, all too difficult to feel appreciated or respected for being who you are. It is a world in which it is treacherously easy for adolescents to trip up and break the rules but in which no one can be bothered to help them avoid tripping in the first place. Adolescence is rarely an easy time. But it need not be as hard as it often is in America.

The Road to Whatever
Elliott Currie, 2004, page 254

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)

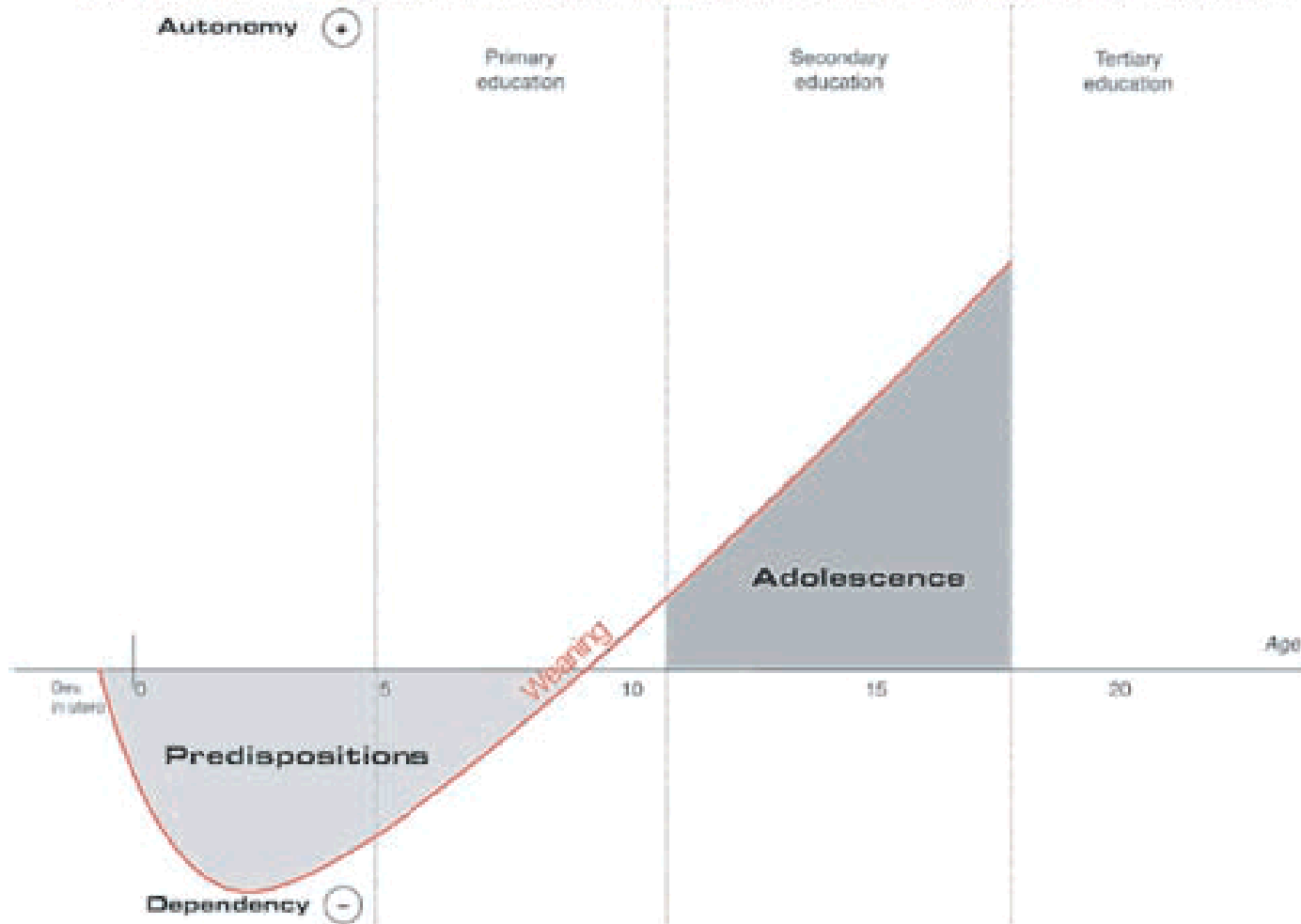
**The Home (Emotions)
The Community (Inspiration)
The School (Intellectual)**

Progressively, however, modern society had attempted to define Education as Schooling and has defined schools as having a similar three parts - Academic, Socialisation and Control

"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.

GRAPH 2: INTELLECTUAL WEANING BASED ON NORMAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



Adolescence

Adolescence is currently seen as a "problem" in Western Society; that excess of hormones leaves the rapidly maturing child unaware of its new physical strength, and confused as to how to direct it. While modern parents and teachers find adolescence disruptive, earlier cultures directed this energy in ways that developed those skills on which the community was dependent for its ongoing survival. In doing so it also ensured that young people learned, and practiced, what was seen as appropriate social behavior.

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.

"To blame schools for the rising tide of mediocrity is to confuse symptom with disease. Schools can rise no higher than the expectations of the communities that surround them."

Ernest Boyer. Former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

"This township believes in functional literacy, that is, the ability to be comfortable with all the change of a rapidly evolving, highly technological society.

Comfort depends on mastering the skills of learning, and knowing that it is the individual's responsibility to develop this for a further 70 years or more after leaving school. It depends on four skills: the ability to *think*, to *communicate*, to *collaborate*, and to *make decisions*."

Mission Statement,
Princeton, New Jersey, USA

Cognitive Apprenticeship

1. Modeling
2. Scaffolding
3. Fading
4. Discussion

... a way of "going beyond what comes naturally". A form of intellectual weaning that balances the rate of physical maturation.

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

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.

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. This presentation will call for these assumptions to be reversed in the light of modern understanding about how humans learn.

"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

“Classes are boring, ‘cos we don’t have to think about what we are doing. We’re just told to copy stuff down off the board or from what the teacher tells us. It makes us lazy... in fact, sorry to say this, but it’s you teachers who make us lazy.”

Opening Minds _ Unlocking Futures?

“We are not blind! We are men and women with eyes and brains... and we don't have to be driven hither and thither by the blind workings of The Market, or of History, or of Progress, or of any other abstraction.”

Fritz Schumacher
*“Small is Beautiful; Economics as if
People mattered”*, 1973

"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.

So what is the "New Story"?

"In contemporary capitalist society, the central value of moneymaking goes hand in hand with the glorification of material consumption.....

Accordingly, political rhetoric in America moves swiftly from "freedom" to "free trade" and "free markets". The free flow of capital and goods is equated with the lofty ideal of human freedom, and material acquisition is portrayed as a basic human right, increasingly even as an obligation."

Fritjof Capra
The Hidden Connections, 2002

As the new century unfolds, there are two developments which will have a defining impact on the future of humanity. Both have to do with networks and both involve radically new technologies. One is the rise of global capitalism, which is concerned with electronic networks of financial and informational flows; the other the creation of sustainable communities based on ecological literacy and the practice of ecodesign, concerned with ecological networks of energy and material flows. The goal of the global economy is to maximize the wealth and power of its elites; whilst the goal of ecodesign is to maximize the sustainability of the web of life.

Fritjof Capra
*The Hidden Connections:
a science for sustainable living, 2002*

It appears to me as a school teacher that schools are already a major cause of weak families and weak communities. They separate parents and children from vital interaction with each other and from true curiosity about each other's lives. Schools stifle family originality by appropriating the critical time needed for any sound idea of family to develop - then they blame family for its failure to be a family. Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist. It should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves what you are doing, wherever you are, whoever you are with. It should teach you what is important, how to live and how to die."

John Taylor Gatto 1992

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