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American Community School

BATTERY HENS OR FREE-RANGE CHICKENS? WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION FOR WHAT KIND OF WORLD?

Egham Conference
16th April, 2008

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?

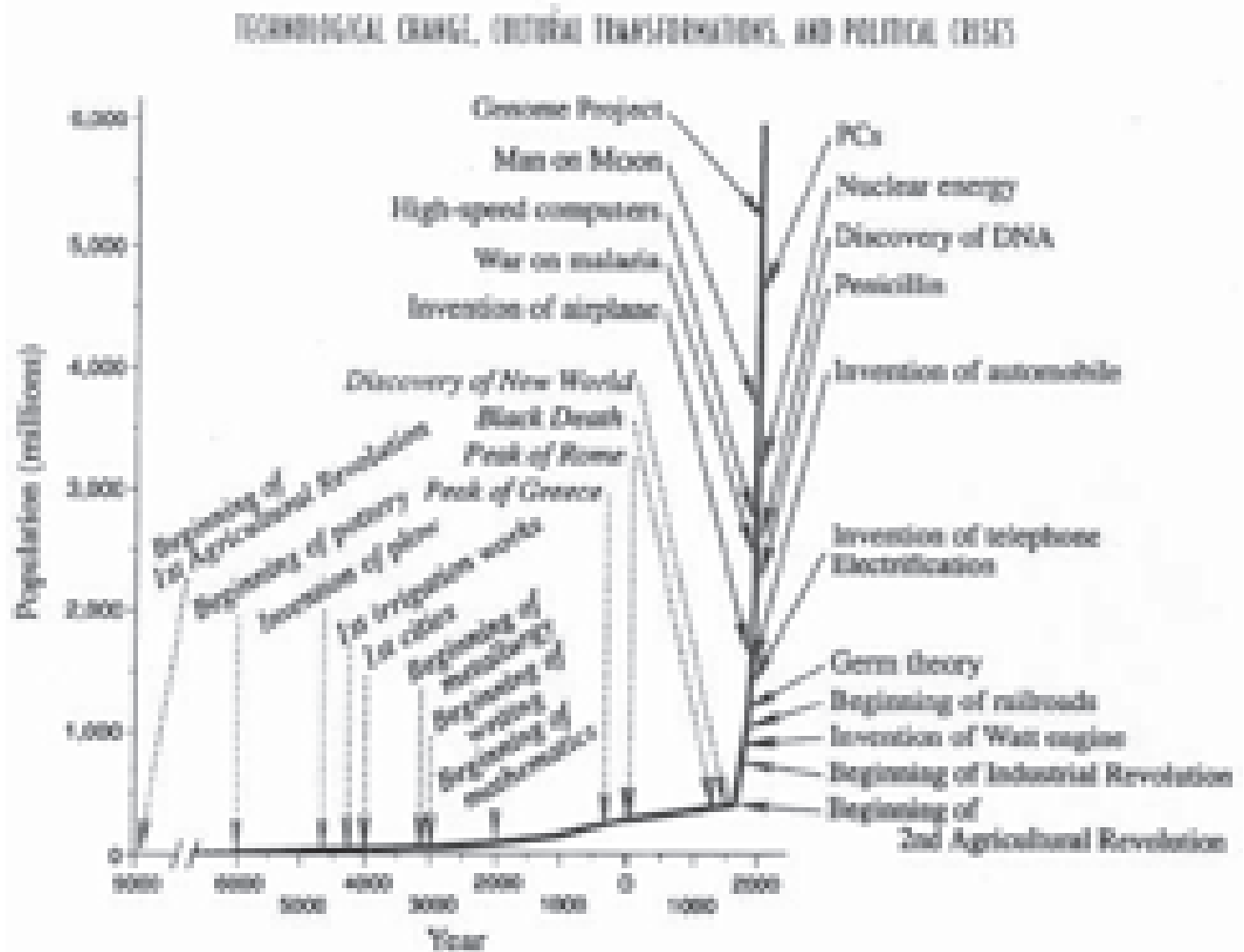
“If civilisation is to survive, it must live on the interest, not the capital, of nature. Ecological markers suggest that in the early 1960’s, humans were using 70% of nature’s yearly output; by the early 1980’s we’d reached 100%; and in 1999 we were at 125%.

Ronald Wright
A Short History of Progress 2004

The most crucial location in space and time (apart from the big bang itself) could be here and now. I think the odds are no better than fifty-fifty that our present civilisation on Earth will survive to the end of the present century... What happens here on Earth, in this century, could conceivably make the difference between a near eternity filled with ever more complex and subtle forms of life and one filled with nothing but base matter.

Taken from: *Our Final Century? A scientist's warning: how terror, error and environmental disaster threaten Humankind's future – in this country, on earth, and beyond*; Sir Martin Rees, 2003; Astronomer Royal and Professor of Astrophysics at Cambridge, 2003

A Short Walk through Economic History



The graph depicts the growth of world population and some major events in the history of technology.

The graph comes from Robert William Fogel. *The Fourth Great Awakening & The Future of Egalitarianism*, 2000.

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?



A bone pressure plaque from Blanchard, France, dating from about 30,000 years ago. The sequential phases of the moon have been engraved from observation over two and a quarter months. Nothing comparable for the next ten thousand years has been as yet uncovered. It is the first conceptual performance of Homo Sapiens. After: *Evolution of the Brain, Creation of the Self*, Sir John Eccles.

“Learning is a consequence of thinking”

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.

What was your most powerful learning experience?

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

Learning and schooling are not
synonymous.

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

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

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

Five Minds for the Future

- The Disciplinary Mind
- The Synthesizing Mind
- The Creating Mind
- The Respectful Mind
- The Ethical Mind

Professor. Howard Gardner, 2006
Harvard Graduate School of Education

IB programmes aim to develop internationally-minded people who, recognising our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better, more peaceful world. IB learners strive to be:

- Inquirers
- Knowledgeable
- Thinkers
- Communicators
- Principled
- Open-minded
- Risk-takers
- Balanced
- Caring
- Reflective

I call, therefore, a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all the offices both private and public, of peace and war.

John Milton, 1644

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

Friedrich Nietzsche
1844-1900

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 awaken 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, *The Dangers of Good Teaching* 1927

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

“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.”

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

Vaclav Havel, 2000

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

At present there are differences of opinion ... for all peoples do not agree as to the things that the young ought to learn, either with a view to virtue or with a view to the best life, nor is it clear whether their studies should be regulated more with regard to intellect or with regard to character.

Aristotle

Evolutionary Intelligence

"Human beings, together with all their likes and dislikes, their senses and sensibilities, did not fall ready-made from the sky; nor were they born with minds and bodies that bare no imprints of the history of then- species. Many of our abilities and susceptibilities are specific adaptations to ancient environmental problems, rather than separate manifestations of a general intelligence for all Seasons."

John D. Barrow
The Artful Universe, 1996

Nature via Nurture

Genes are designed to take their cues from nurture. To appreciate what has happened you will have to abandon cherished notions and open your mind. You will have to enter a world where your genes are no puppet masters pulling the strings of your behaviour, but are puppets at the mercy of your behaviour, a world where instinct is not the opposite of learning, where environmental influences are sometimes less reversible than genetic ones, and where nature is designed for nurture ... the human brain is built for nurture.

Matt Ridley

Nature via Nurture, 2003

“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

e.g. The Stirkfontein Caves, the Kalahari
Bushmen and the Hadza

"Learning ... that 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 Independent 14/02/07

“How the well-being of British children compares”

Unicef used six categories to judge young people in 21 countries

Dimensions of child well-being	Average ranking position (all dimensions)	Dimension 1 Poverty and inequality	Dimension 2 Health and safety	Dimension 3 Education	Dimension 4 Family and friendships	Dimension 5 Sex, drink, drugs	Dimension 6 Happiness
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Switzerland	8.3	5	9	14	4	12	6
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Ireland	10.2	19	19	7	7	4	5
Belgium	10.7	7	16	1	5	19	16
Germany	11.2	13	11	10	13	11	9
Canada	11.8	6	13	2	18	17	15
Greece	11.8	15	18	16	11	8	3
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

Before the lights begin to dim

or

Where have all the
story-tellers gone?

“Why Love Matters: How Affection shapes a baby’s brain”

“Our earliest experiences are not simply laid down as memories or influences, they are translated into precise physiological patterns of response in the brain that then set the neurological rules for how we deal with our feelings and those of other people for the rest of our lives. It’s not nature or nurture, but both. How we are treated as babies and toddlers determines the way in which what we’re born with turns into what we are.”

Sue Gerhardt 2004

"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, yet it has remained hospitable to life at least three and a half billion years. 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. Recently scientists caught a glimpse of the violence of that great burning star that makes our life possible. They detected a shock wave on the sun. 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'.

"That act of thought is almost as great a miracle as the universe. We are a sub-microscopic 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".

If our society were truly to appreciate the significance of children's emotional ties throughout the first years of life, it would no longer tolerate children growing up, or parents having to struggle, in situations that cannot possibly nourish healthy growth. Mastering our current social challenges requires that we discard older views that divide the mind into distinct segments, that see intellect and emotion as separate, even contradictory, elements. These outdated contradictions have too long permitted us to ignore every child's need for a stable, loving setting in the early years, the very environment that well-functioning nuclear and extended families seem tailor-made to provide.

Stanley I. Greenspan
The Growth of the Mind, 1997

The stress response is "set" by the age of six months and the various neurotransmitters and neuropeptide systems are also strongly influenced by both pre-natal and post-natal experiences. Geneticists often fail to recognise the environmental influences of these systems, attributing the low serotonin, low norepinephrine or low dopamine levels associated with criminality, to inheritance.

Sue Gerhardt
"Why Love Matters:
How affection shapes the human brain"
2004

“Teaching is, after all, only a job. What is difficult to achieve is changing the mindset of many of our colleagues, at both teacher and management levels, who think they must work every evening and much of their weekends, or they will be letting their students down”.

Deborah Duncan, Headteacher
Work-life Balance; Myth or possibility?
Association of School and College Leaders
March 2006

“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

“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

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

"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
Robert Sylwester, June 1995

...[parents'] greatest aspiration for their children is that they be well-balanced and content, that they grow up feeling confident about having children of their own. Such hopes are unlikely to be realized without a rethink of both the school curriculum and the relationship between schools, parents and community.

[Parenthood] is the only sort of work that currently allows us to lift our eyes from the present and impels us to consider what we would like life to be for a generation other than our own. Children, it turns out, are the necessary countervailing force to liberal modernity.

Laurie and Matthew Taylor
Article in "Prospect" Magazine, June 2001
(also the authors of "What are Children For?")

"(In 30 years teaching) I've come to believe that genius is an exceedingly common human quality, probably natural to most of us.

The raw material people have always used to educate themselves; privacy, choice, freedom from surveillance and as broad a range of situations and human associations as they can manage."

"Teaching is not like applying paint to create a beautiful picture, it is more like carving and the removal of the waste to reveal all that is within the hidden structure."

"Dumbing us Down; The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling

John Taylor Gatto, 1992

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