

Life-Long Learning

In the past three decades, there has been a growing movement to reinvent the way citizens learn and how young people are introduced into society. Homeschooling, charter schools, cyberschools, unschooling, life-long learning, Waldorf schools, and Sudbury schools are just a few of the elements of this movement. The movement has been growing exponentially each decade since 1980. It has become a challenge to the traditional school/teach/educate system. Life-long learning has been promot-



ed by management guru Peter Drucker in "Post Capitalist Society" on one end of the spectrum and, on the other end, by Elise Boulding in "Building Global Civic Culture," and by many scholars in between.

The bottom line in this movement is to provide the freedom, opportunity and resources for self-learners of all ages, with their families and in community, to choose to learn what they want, when they want and how they want -- to self-learn.

Recognition

In spite of the rapid growth of this movement, it has drawn little positive attention from governments. Professional educators and their unions have shown concern that the proliferation of homeschooling will draw funds away from the public school system. A few public school systems have accepted the challenge and established special programs to provide would-be homeschoolers and other self-learners more autonomy within the public school system. Some have established parent-teacher programs that depend on parental involvement and give parents greater autonomy in the learning process. But, as parents are increasingly recognizing that personal liberty and

private protection from control by majority rule applies to their children's learning, none of the existing systems have completely incorporated that concept. Nor do they fully meet the needs of our information society which requires a life-long learning system to provide for each individual's continual learning processes, as detailed in the work of writers and thinkers from John Holt and Alfie Kohn to Daniel Pink and Howard Gardner; among so many others.

Foundations, likewise, have been slow to rise to the challenge and opportunity that is unfolding. The millions of dollars for public schools, coming from all levels of government, is followed by

millions more coming from private foundations. But little, if any, of this private funding is available for the many non-public school experiments being undertaken. A search of the philanthropy databases with words like "homeschooling" comes up with no program in any foundation. Whereas a search under "schools" or "education" comes up with many thousands. Individual appeals to hundreds of foundations by "homeschool support groups," "learning co-ops" and other forms of nonschool learning communities are regularly returned with the words "this proposal does not fit into our current program of support."

Motivation

Motivations for moving toward self-learning and abandonment of traditional public schooling are many. Perhaps the most prevalent is parental concern about the loss of control of the learning of young children. Many families want to take direct responsibility for their curriculum, approach to learning, and the principles and values upon which these are based. Some parents believe that the public school system instills values which run contrary to those of their family. Some are explicitly guided by their religious beliefs to direct the education of their children. Others

have had disturbing experiences with schoolyard bullies, unfeeling teachers, or misdirected bureaucracies. A few hold that government support is inherently controlling, and that their tax dollars are binding families to a failing system.

Self-learners are also influenced by education critics, philosophers and religious leaders. Some, like Ivan Illich, believe our current life, including school, is based on the principle of work now for future rewards. They urge that schooling, and life, be convivial and vernacular. That is, that learning and work

should be carried out in joyful collaboration with family, friends and neighbors. And that it should be embedded in the local culture, ecology, and friendships.

With Paulo Friere, some see schools as perpetuating the socio-economic rich/poor status quo and preventing the natural social evolution that would occur if future citizens were given more freedom to self-learn in their own families, communities, and nature.

Following John Holt and others, many believe that every brain, that is every student, is unique and no two are prepared to learn the same thing at the

Motivation continued

same time in the same way. They believe that schooling is not an efficient way to learn, nor for future citizens to be introduced into society.

Most great philosophical traditions, including those embodied in Gandhi, Tagore, Aurobindo and Krishnamurti, recognize a spiritual

component to learning, teaching that knowledge is more than a way to get a job or score well on a standardized test; that it is the purpose for living, it is being human. Rabindrnath Tagore started his learning community, Santiniketan, to transform the human mindset from self-interest, competition

and materialism to mutual aid, cooperation, and the love of learning.

Growing out of a variety of personal, philosophical, educational, or religious motivations, the life-long self-learning movement continues to expand.

Proof of Effectiveness

It is impossible to measure the success of self-learning with tests, grades, and scores. Perhaps the most interesting successes are found among those learners who do not flourish in a traditional setting with standard measurements of success. These individuals are free to blossom in their own ways and do -- anecdotal evidence abounds about happy and successful learners who have traveled a nontraditional path to their own personal success.

Self-learners are equally honored among our greatest leaders. Thomas Edison, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Abigail Adams, Benjamin Franklin, the Wright Brothers, Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, and Margaret Mead are only a few of those who have learned without school. The newspapers are filled with stories of less well-known successes. Ryan Abradi, of Maine, showed an interest in numbers at an early age, so his parents let him stay home and self-learn; by age 10 he was working his way through second-year college calculus. Caitlin Stern of Haines, Alaska, stayed out of school and became a recognized expert by studying bald eagles in the wild. Jedediah Purdy, a self-learner from West Virginia, graduated summa cum laude from Harvard University; in 1996 he was selected as a Truman Scholar and as West Virginia's nominee for the Rhodes Scholarship. He then went on to Yale Law School and, in

the meantime, wrote a best selling book.

The growth rate of self-learning is a partial measure of its success. From a few scattered homeschoolers in 1980, perhaps 20,000, the number has grown, according to Newsweek Magazine, to over 200,000 in 1990, and into a broad integrated network of an estimated 2,000,000 today.

Considerable research has shown that students learn much more easily when they self-learn. As long ago as 1930, the "8 Year Study" of 30 special schools demonstrated that: "The most effective schools used a different approach to learning. Instead of organizing learning by subjects, they organized it around themes of significance to their students." There seemed to be an inverse relationship between success in college and formalized education as opposed to student selected learning.

A recent Cornell University study confirmed this and showed that schooled children become "peer dependent" while those who learned with their parents have more self-confidence, optimism, and courage to explore. A Moore Foundation study of children of parents who had been arrested for truancy found that their homeschooled children ranked 30 percent higher on standard tests than the average classroom child.

Providing possible insight into the reasons behind these successes, a UCLA project showed that the average

schooled student receives 7 minutes of personal attention a day but the self-learner receives from 100 to 300 minutes of attention daily. Following this, a Smithsonian Report on genius concluded that high achievement was a result of time with responsive parents, little time with peers, and considerable time for free exploration.

Standardized tests reflect self-learner success as well. Time Magazine reported that "the average home schooler's SAT score is 1100, 80 points higher than the average score for the general population."

Dr. Lawrence M. Rudner, conducted a study in 1998 that included 20,760 students in 11,930 families. He found that in every subject and at every grade level (K-12), homeschool students scored significantly higher than their public and private school counterparts. Some 25 percent of all homeschool students at that time were enrolled at a grade level or more beyond that indicated by their age. According to the study, the average eighth-grade homeschooler was performing four grade levels above the national average. The average ACT score was 21 out of a possible 36 for public schooled children. It averaged 23 for self-learners. This qualifies the average college-bound self-learner for the most prestigious universities.

Vision

This movement is not only addressing the why, how, when and what all citizens learn, but is also rebuilding the foundation for the society in which we all live. How we learn determines the kind of society we build. Authoritarian, hierarchal, undemocratic schools pre-

pare future citizens for an authoritarian, hierarchal, undemocratic society. A life-long learning system based in family, community, society and nature could be the foundation for new democracies of freedom, equity and justice.

The movement continues to pro-

mote the concepts of life-long self-learning, in all its complexities, to a wider audience, to address critics on the issues of accountability and credibility, and to raise funds to help those working to bring its ideals to fruition.

Notes:

See "Resources and Further Reading" at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LearningCommunities/files/Life-Long%20Learning/>

Discuss: Creating Learning Communities discussion list --

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LearningCommunities/>

Comments/suggestions: Bill Ellis (tranet@rangeley.org) or Nance Confer (marbleface@aol.com)

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Transformative Thinking:

Adcock, John. "In Place of Schools." Heretics Press. UK 1994

Aurobindo -- Integral Yoga Literature
<http://www.miraura.org/lit/sa/sabcl.html>

Boulding, Elise. "Building A Global Civic Culture." New York: Teachers College Press, 1988

Capra, Fritjof. "The Hidden Connections." New York, Random House. 2002

Carter, Barry. "Infinite Wealth." Woburn MA, Burrenworth-Heinemann. 1999

Doyon, Juanita. "Not With Our Kids You Don't!" Heinemann, 2002.

Drucker, Peter. "Post-Capitalist Society." Harper Business, 1993.

Emerson: <http://killdevilhill.com/emerson.html>

"I would have the studies elective. Scholarship is to be created not by compulsion, but by awakening a pure interest in knowledge. The wise instructor accomplishes this by opening to his pupils precisely the attractions the study has for himself."

Encyclopedia of Informal Education <http://www.infed.org/>

Florida, Richard. "The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life" Basic Books, 2002.

Freire, Paulo -- Perhaps the most influential thinker about education in the late twentieth century, Paulo Freire has been particularly popular with informal educators with his emphasis on dialogue and his concern for the oppressed. <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm>

Hayes, Charles. "Beyond the American Dream: Lifelong Learning and the Search for Meaning in a Postmodern World. Autodidactic Press. Wasilla AK, 1999 <http://www.autodidactic.com> [Upcoming publication: "The Rapture of Maturity: One Last Chance to Live a Life That Really Matters"]

A brief introduction to holistic education:

What is holistic education? What are the primary philosophies that distinguish it from traditional education? Who were the pioneers in holistic education? Ron Miller provides an introduction.

<http://www.infed.org/biblio/holisticeducation.htm>

Forbes, Scott H. "Holistic Education: An Analysis of Its Ideas and Nature" Vol. 8 in The Foundations of Holistic Education Series (July 2003)

International Foundation for Holistic Education, Dr. Ramon Gallegos Nava summarizes Dr. Nava's "Multi-dimensional Multi-level Perspective of Holistic Education" as well as providing English speakers with a summary of Nava's vision for a "pedagogy of universal love" and information about the annual conference. For the Spanish version of this web site, see: <http://www.educacionholista.com/conferencias.htm> For English: <http://www.educacionholista.com/englishversions.htm>

Holt, John -- Holt's explorations of the failures of formal teaching and schooling influenced a generation of educators. By looking to the experiences and interests of children, and the sense they made of learning and education, we can find great possibility.
<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/holt.htm>

Mahatma Gandhi on education:

His critique of western, particularly English, education was part of his critique of Western "civilization" as a whole. Barry Burke explores his vision.
<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gand.htm>

Gardner, Howard - multiple links:

<http://www.parentdirectededucation.org/Thinking%20Parent/Gardner.htm>

Illich, Ivan. "Deschooling Society." Marion Boyars, London & St Paul 1971 <http://www.PKImaging.com/fil/desch/>

Kohn, Alfie -- Books <http://www.alfiekohn.org/books/books.htm>

The Teachings of J. Krishnamurti -- On Learning:

<http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/searchresults.asp>

Mathews, Ryan and Wacker, Watts. "The Deviant's Advantage: How Fringe Ideas Create Mass Markets" Crown Business Publications, 2002.

Miller, Ron, Ed. "Creating Learning Communities." Foundation for

Educational Renewal, Barndon VT (September 2000)

Ohanian, Susan. "What Happened to Recess and Why Are Our Children Struggling in Kindergarten?" McGraw-Hill, 2002.

Pink, Daniel. "Free Agent Nation" Warner Books; (May 2002).

Pinker, Steven. "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" Viking Press, 2002.

Priesnitz, Wendy. "Challenging Assumptions in Education." The Alternate Press, St George, CANADA

Purdy, Jedediah. "For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today." Knopf; (September 1999)

Quinn, Daniel. "Beyond Civilization." New York: Random House, 1999

Tagore on education:

As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the global village, Rabindranath Tagore's educational model has a unique sensitivity and aptness for education within multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations, amidst conditions of acknowledged economic discrepancy and political imbalance. Kathleen M. O'Connell explores Rabindranath Tagore's contribution.

<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tagore.htm>

Studies on Effectiveness:

THE STORY of the EIGHT-YEAR STUDY <http://www.8yearstudy.org/>

Moore Foundation

<http://www.moorefoundation.com/When%20Education%20Becomes%20A%20buse.html>

Contains references to:

UCLA Study -- 10. Goodlad JI: A study of schooling: Some findings and hypotheses. Phi Delta Kappan 1983;64(7):465

Smithsonian Study -- 11. McCurdy HG: The childhood pattern of genius. Horizon 1960;2:33-38

Cornell Study -- 12. Bronfenbrenner U: Two Worlds of Childhood; US and USSR. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1970, pp97-101.

Philanthropy:

Grant Databases and Listserves

http://www.indiana.edu/~ird/grant_agencies.html

Philanthropic Databases

<http://www.cod.edu/library/philanthropy/Databases.htm>

General Homeschooling References:

Thinking About Homeschooling -- NHEN

<http://www.nhen.org/newhser/default.asp?id=227>

Homeschooling -- Some Basic Statistics:

http://homeschoolinformation.com/homeschooling/homeschool_statistics1.htm

Rudner, Lawrence M., Ph.D. "The Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students." Education Policy Analysis Archives: March 23, 1999. <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v7n8/>

Welner and Welner: "Contextualizing Homeschooling Data: A Response to Rudner" <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v7n13links.html>

Ryan Abradi and Caitlin Stern

http://164.116.126.22/Home_Education/public/articles/nwswk_oct5_4.htm

Jedediah Purdy

<http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=Bio&contactID=222>

"Making the Grade." Newsweek: Oct. 26, 1998

Gibbs, Nancy. "Home Sweet School." Time: Oct. 31, 1994

Famous People Who Homeschooled

<http://www.home4schoolgear.com/famoushomeschooler.html>