

Chapter 17 – The Trouble with Traditional Schooling

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The Trouble with Traditional Schooling

by Vahram G. Diehl

Traditional concepts and applications of learning have generally been one-sided. The “teacher” transmits information in the form of conclusions through words and images, while the “students” are expected to act as flawless receivers and adopters of these conclusions; they are to memorize them until the appropriate moment of testing commences and then to regurgitate the same words and images in a context that demonstrates the transmission was mostly successful. The more complete the regurgitation, the higher grade a student will receive and accordingly be considered smarter and more capable.

With this style of information soaking and squeezing, the ratio of students to teachers can be rather high and still function with moderate success. When the only role of the teacher is to serve as a one-way streaming thoroughfare for information and the students are relegated to docile receptacles of this information, dozens or even hundreds of passive students can be accommodated by one active teacher. This creates an active/passive class separation between the two groups; the teacher’s only job is to actively teach, the students’ only job is to passively learn. In this system of imposed homogeneity, the naturally faster learners are made to sacrifice their own progress so that others might catch up; the naturally slower learners are made to cut corners to create the appearance of equality.

This state of extended passive receptivity gives rise to problems in many students whose minds do not take well to the building of new logical constructs in such a dormant mental state. Even in the seemingly passive act of reading of a book, it is the mind of the reader that actively instigates the advancement of each new word or the turning of the page, and it is the will of the reader to retain the information presented. The inability to learn without active engagement is readily obvious in young children who will typically only participate and pay attention when they are allowed to somehow actively engage in the learning process, which they eagerly do.

For some strange reason, it has become expected that after a few years of gentle conditioning to passivity and weaning away from genuine educational interaction that students of a certain age will easily do away with their juvenile traits of curiosity and enthusiasm. The only function this serves is that they may become more easily

manageable for the sole teacher supplied to keep them in line and to efficiently expedite the information transmission process. The students who have the most difficult time relinquishing their natural temperaments toward action are labeled as feeble-minded and troublemakers, though human history has shown that the most brilliant and ambitious of men are often the ones who retain their natural luster and are subject to these labels and ostracisms.

When schooling is passive and not incited by the curiosity of the students, it usually results in very fragmented and incomplete education. Teachers and rulers determine for the students which arbitrarily divided subcategories of information are most pertinent and valuable to learn, in what sequence they will be learned, and on what schedule. When an education is compartmentalized and centrally planned like this, students are given content with no context. They come to see the world in segmented chunks of the loosely known details, intermittently obscured by gaping holes of the bluntly unknown. This happens in place of an active and voluntary education, where every new piece of information would fall into logical consistency with and compliment every previous piece of information in the gradual building of an increasingly accurate worldview, like a lens slowly coming into focus. Instead, old topics are seen as outdated and irrelevant compared to whatever the favored subcategory of the moment happens to be.

Ultimately, the passive learners become highly refined specialists on one particular sliver of reality, while largely ignoring the rest of existence and passing off all other knowledge as someone else's field and responsibility; nothing is integrated with past knowledge and the student excels only at regurgitating and applying professionally the same conclusions that were presented to him during his schooling.

This overall process when applied from early youth onward has a cumulatively dehumanizing effect on the students. The long hours required to be at school necessarily bestow upon teachers and other administrative staff a partial parental role over the young, without qualification or consent. They understandably fail to perform the full spectrum of tasks required for the upbringing of a healthy and capable adult human, including but not limited to providing proper nutrition, emotional support and expression, natural socialization, ethics, passion, compassion, love, reason, nonviolent communication, etc. The students are made to sacrifice a major part of the natural maturing process so that they will learn the subjects deemed appropriate by society and their teachers. This is in no way a fair trade.

The uniformity in schooling destroys individuality and creativity in humans. As all children are taught to think in the same socially acceptable ways, comparatively few will go on to have vastly original insights and create unique works of art. Because the teaching styles are not tailored to natural individual styles of learning and coming to understand the world, most will be made to forfeit their own innate ways of thinking and to adopt the same

intellectual and emotional methods of everyone else. Progress for all of civilization itself is stifled because most people are only capable of replicating what they are already familiar with and few will seek new and radical changes in the way things are done, however much better those changes might be.

Evolution is driven by the enormous diversity of traits in effect and actively being replicated. By restricting diversity, one cannot avoid restricting evolution itself.

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