

The Next School



Send him mail.



“Insight for the Young and Unrestrained” is an original column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found here. IYU-only RSS feed available here.

Education is the process through which an individual mind gains understanding of principles of change, or cause and effect relationships in reality. This differs from training, which is usually just the presentation of conclusions derived from understanding these principles. Education is foremost about gaining an understanding of a system of correlated information. Training is foremost about how to apply information.

To put it one way:

Training is memorizing the fact that the earth revolves around the sun.

Education is understanding the laws of planetary motion which allow you to arrive at that fact.

Consider a mechanic who understands the principles of combustion and the construction of the engine which makes the car work compared to the driver who only needs to know how to turn the steering wheel and which pedal makes it stop. Or the difference between a music theorist and a musical performer. One intimately understands the mathematics and tonal relationships of harmony; the other can follow instructions on command and produce intended notes at the right time on a given instrument. In fact, at some point in history, the terms “musician” and “musical performer” carried these similar but distinct meanings respectively.

Much of what is typically called “education” around the world is actually just training in a specific set of skills or cultural values.

For example, if you look what is called “religious education,” it usually amounts to little more than training a child or recent convert in how to speak, dress, pray, and act in accordance with that religion’s list of rules and values. Rarely is there any real education

on major cosmological principles of change. Or consider the concept of etiquette. It is training to condition a child to shake a stranger's hand when they meet for the first time, or to tuck in their shirt at a formal occasion. While these practices certainly serve their purposes, most are totally arbitrary and esoteric.

Training to perform a task is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. It's a necessary part of navigating the modern world with its constantly shifting technologies and methodologies. The problem comes when training replaces education. The majority of educational institutions around the world specialize in teaching children how to act, not how to think. This creates adults who lack character, ambition, intellectual integrity, and an ever-expanding sense of identity.

Another thing to consider is... It should come as no surprise that learning is not strictly an intellectual process. The ability to learn is dependent upon a student's level of curiosity, patience, dedication, and sense of self-worth. These are all powerful emotional forces which cannot be neglected and ignored if true education is to be accomplished.

Under natural settings, it would be the duty of parents, family members, and other friendly older figures in a young person's life to ensure the development of these healthy emotional capacities until they reach adulthood. Under traditional schooling, children are taken away from their parents for the majority of the day and left to develop under the unfamiliar eyes of state-appointed strangers simultaneously tasked with keeping dozens of other children in line. It is a physical impossibility for these types of teachers to act as an instigator of the necessary emotional tools inherent to healthy education and human development.

A proper education must be entirely voluntary and initiated by the curiosity of the student to learn the particular information at hand. A five-year-old will not learn how to read without the desire to know how to read. A teenager will not learn algebra or chemistry without a desire to understand them. This desire can either come from a fear of negative consequences from not learning them ("bad grades," punishment, parental and social scorn, the pathological fear of being perpetually stuck flipping burgers to make ends meet), or a genuine enthusiasm for gaining new knowledge and abilities.

The inescapable conclusion is that a teacher must become a specialist in creating either **fear** or **enthusiasm** in children.

A proper educator should be emotionally qualified to nurture the development of these basic humanities in the age range of children they choose to work with. In other words, if you wouldn't trust them to raise your children for you, should you really trust them to be their primary emotional influences?

Let's take a look at the educational options available to most people:

Public School

Public school is almost universally poorly funded. This means there are never enough teachers or learning materials to satisfy the multitudes of students. Furthermore, because public school is funded through taxation and not free market voluntary exchange, it is not subject to a proprietary incentive to continually be improving and optimizing its services. Because it is designed and implemented by the whim of the majority and their elected officials, public schools can never cater to any form of outliers. They are designed for the average person to be able to produce easily quantifiable results and prepare them for college admissions.

Private School

Private schools are prohibitively expensive for most parents, if for no other reason than the fact that the taxes for public school must still be paid whether or not it is ever attended. While generally superior to lackluster public schooling, the quality of education in private schools can vary widely depending upon the limitations and biases of the methodology upon which it is based. They can even create a sense of privilege and entitlement over students who had to go to “regular” school.

Homeschool

Homeschooling, while not particularly expensive, comes with a major opportunity cost that is impossible for many parents to bear. If both parents work full time, homeschooling is impossible. It also depends entirely on the parent’s abilities as instructors, which is a role many are not prepared to play past early childhood for their own kids. If proper attention is not taken to keep the children involved in social activities, it can be very isolating for them. Finally, while homeschooling is gaining in popularity, it is still at a point where it does not carry the same social merit as having attending an “official” schooling institution.

Private Lessons & Tutoring

Individual private instructors are available for almost any subject imaginable. They come in all levels of quality and cost. Because they are seen as supplementary, their effectiveness is often limited by a child’s primary obligation to complete their traditional schooling matters first. The education from these types of teachers usually happens in short sporadic sessions (such as an hour or two a week) so a continuity of thought and progress is difficult to achieve. As with homeschooling, the social merit of taking guitar lessons or learning calculus from a tutor instead of a class is erroneously considered very low.

Self-Education

Finally, humanity’s oldest form of education. Self-education occurs every day through tools

like books, videos, images, audio, and good old-fashioned trial and error. Technology has made self-education on any topic a viable option for anyone in the developed world. However, significant self-education requires a student who is intensely naturally driven to learn and expand their knowledge. There is also no live external guide or influence to help a budding mind through trouble spots, incite further curiosity, or aim their attention in new directions they would never see on their own. While self-education is a powerful tool in the right hands, it can never compare to having a second set of eyes to show us what our biases fail to see. It should also go without saying that, except to other self-educators, it will never carry much weight in the world to say you read about something in a book rather than learned it in a classroom.

So...

Why do most schools and educational institutions fail to teach their students how to think?

Why are the fundamental emotional components of learning hardly ever addressed by conventional educators?

The simple truth is that there are thousands of naturally qualified and experienced individuals across North America, Europe, and the rest of the world who could be amazing assets to developing children and their parents. You will never hear about these people because they do not fit the reigning social mold for what a teacher is supposed to look like. They come in all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds, each specializing in their own unique form of mentoring influence.

The best thing a caring parent can do for their children is to be there for them physically, emotionally, and intellectually during their formative years. However, as children get older, they will naturally start to reach out beyond the boundaries of what any single set of parents can provide for them. This is why additional mentors, guides, coaches, and substitute older siblings are so important to the developing mind and personality of a child.

Human history is riddled with social and technological revolutions. It happened when our hunter ancestors adopted agriculture as their primary means of acquiring food. It happened when we began to use electric light or the automobile. It's happening now with the way we raise our kids and share the dearth of human knowledge acquired in generations past. The revolution of decentralized education may change the world more than any other revolution prior. It could fundamentally change human culture as we know it.

We live now in the age of information, where experts are everywhere and anyone with a laptop can access the majority of knowledge ever discovered. Anyone who wants to learn something will find a way to learn it. But what we are still lacking is a large proportion of people capable of catering to the emotional needs of children and students as they grow. We have no one to challenge us, comfort us, and push us to where we did not know we

could go.

Who do you want guiding your children? Someone who relies upon a series of increasing threats to keep them focused and moving along the path society chose for them? Or someone who uses their emotional and intellectual expertise to encourage them along a developmental journey tailored individually for their temperament and interests?

The school of the future isn't a school at all. It's a network for connecting the right coaches and mentors with the right students. Its function is to enable every individual learner to determine their own intellectual path according to their natural strengths and interests, and to provide the emotional influence and encouragement necessary to make this happen. Since no two individual minds are exactly identical, the decentralization and degeneralization of education is the only way to make this happen.

When the first priority in education becomes teaching people how to think and helping them choose for themselves what they are most interested in learning, human societies around the world are bound to undergo massive progressive change. We may even make major leaps in ending the various social problems and forms of strife created by populations becoming obsessed with asserting and preserving their training through violent conquest of superficially different people. We may open countless new doorways to philosophical & economic exchange, scientific advancement, and broadening of narrow human mindsets. It's impossible to see just how amazing and far-reaching this paradigm shift may be in regards to creating a world of greater peace, prosperity, freedom, and overall happiness.