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### A PROPER EDUCATION

I left school and the university with my head packed full of knowledge; enough of it, anyway, to pass all the examinations that were put in my path. It was, naturally, a rather partial sort of knowledge, containing nothing at all of the natural sciences, or of languages other than Latin and Greek. In those days, it was thought that you could not reach the standards required of you in your chosen field and be, at the same time, conversant with all the other fields of study. I was, however, considered by my teachers and my parents to be a well-educated young man.

Unusually for that time, I went into industry. "You are the first member of our family to go into trade," my great-aunt said, with a disapproving sniff. But work was the stuff of life and "industry," or the business of making and selling useful things or services, was an important part of that work, whatever my relatives might feel. As a well-educated young man I rather expected my work to be a piece of cake, something at which my intellect would allow me to excel without undue effort. School and schooling were behind me, thank God, and life could now begin, and life, I felt, was for living, with all the good things that that implied.

It came as something of a shock, therefore, to encounter the world outside for the first time, and to realize that I was woefully ill-equipped, not only for the necessary business of earning a living, but, more importantly, for coping with all the new decisions which came my way, in both life and work. My first employers put it rather well: "You have a well-trained but empty mind," they told me, "which we will now try to fill with something useful, but don't imagine that you will be of any real value to us for the first

ten years." I was fortunate to have lighted upon an employer prepared to invest so much time in what was, in effect, my real education, and I shall always feel guilty that I left them when the ten years were up.

A well-trained mind is not to be sneezed at, but I was soon to discover that my mind had been trained to deal with closed problems, whereas most of what I now had to deal with were open-ended problems. "What is the cost of sales'?" is a closed problem, one with a right or a wrong answer. "What should we do about it?" is an open problem, one with any number of possible answers. Trained in analysis, I had no experience of taking [sic] decisions which might or might not turn out to be good. Knowing the right answer to a question, I came to realize, was not the same as making a difference in a situation, which was what I was supposed to be paid for. Worst of all, the real open-ended question--"What is all this in aid of?"--was beginning to nudge at my mind.

I had been educated in an individualist culture. My scores were mine. No one else came into it, except as competitors in some imagined race. I was on my own in the learning game at school and at the university. Not so in my work, I soon realized. Nothing happened there unless other people cooperated. How to win friends and influence people was not a course in my curriculum. Unfortunately, it was to prove essential in my new life. Being an individual star would not help me much if it was in a failing group. A group failure brought me down along with the group. Our destinies were linked, which meant that my classmates were now colleagues, not competitors. Teams were something I had encountered on the sports field, not in the classroom. They were in the box marked "fun" in my mind, not the one marked "work" or even "life." My new challenge, I discovered, was to merge these three boxes. I had discovered, rather later than most, the necessity of others. It was the start of my real education.

"So you're a university graduate are you?" said my new sales manager. "In classics, is it? I don't think that that is going to impress our Chinese salesmen! How do you propose to win their respect since you will be in charge of some of them very shortly?" Another open-ended problem! I had never before been thrust among people very different from me, with different values and assumptions about the way the world worked, or should work. I had not even met anyone more than two years older, except for relatives and teachers. Cultural exploration was a process unknown to me, and I was not accustomed to being regarded as stupid and ignorant, which I undoubtedly was, in all the things that mattered in their world. It was my first realization that there is more than one way of being intelligent.

My education, I decided then, had been positively disabling. So much of the content of what I had learned was irrelevant, while the process of learning had cultivated a set of attitudes and behaviors which were directly opposed to what seemed to be needed in real life. Although I had studied philosophy I hadn't applied it to myself. I had assumed that the point of life was obvious: to get on, get rich, get a wife, and get a family. It was beginning to be clear that life wasn't as simple as that. What I believed in, what I thought was worth working for, and with whom--these things were becoming important. So was my worry about what I personally could [do] that might not only earn me money but also make a useful contribution somewhere.

It would be nice to think that this sort of experience could not happen now, that our schools, today, prepare people much better for life and for the work which is so crucial to a satisfactory life. But I doubt it. The subjects may appear to be a little more relevant, but we are still left to learn about work at work, and about life by living it. That will always be true, but we could, I believe, do more to make sure that the process

of education had more in common with the processes of living and working as they are today, so that the shock of reality is less cruel....

Schools are charged by society with multiple functions, which is one of their problems, but they are the only safe practice grounds for life that we have. They are, for that reason, precious and protected places, but they need to be clear about the implications. The economic historian R.H. Tawney, returning to Britain after the catastrophic experience of World War I and what he called a world of graves, asked for an education that was "generous, inspiring, and humane" to replace an existing system which was "neither venerable, like a college, nor popular, like a public house, but merely indispensable, like a pillar-box." He decried an approach that was narrowly utilitarian because of its "spiritual crassness" and declared that "only those institutions are loved which touch the imagination." We have still to create those places in most of our societies.

A school for life and work should, I suggest, subscribe to the following propositions, if it is to help its students begin to take responsibility for their lives, for their beliefs about the world, and for the others with whom they work or live or meet, as well as touch their imaginations and inspire their souls.

### **I. THE DISCOVERY OF ONESELF IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD.**

Both are important, of course, but the world will always be there. We need to build up a belief in our competence to deal with it. Too many people experience school as a failure experience, leaving with their self-esteem in tatters, believing that they are stupid, inadequate, and incapable. This is the worst possible starting point from which to begin looking for work or coping with life on one's own, particularly when so much of that work will, in [the] future, have to be created by ourselves. By the turn of the century, it is now clear, less than half of the British workforce will be in full-time long-term jobs. We can no longer rely on our work institutions to fill our empty minds with their skills.

"Look for customers, not jobs," I told my own children when they left college--because only if you can make or do something that other people will pay you money for will you ultimately be employable. But that requires self-confidence, a saleable skill or competence, and social skills of quite a high order. It is not easy to sell one's own goods or services. It should be a guarantee to all children, as a right, that they will have these three components of survival by the time they leave school, for they are the building blocks of self-esteem, the start on the road to a full identity. If the children leave without them, it is the school that has failed.

Nelson Mandela said in his inaugural address: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone."

This sentiment, whether put in a religious context or not, should be one of the articles of belief of a school for life and work. We can do many things to bring it about. We can, for instance, look for ways to give every young person a success experience of some sort every year. That will be easier if the second proposition is adopted.

### **2. EVERYONE IS GOOD AT SOMETHING.**

Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University, once produced a list of

seven different intelligences. The idea that intelligence is so multi-dimensional was a revelation to educa[tors], although on reflection it is obvious. To his list we can now add Daniel Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence. But even without these academic aids we can all make our own list, from our own experience. As time goes by, my own list grows longer as I encounter new examples of intelligence or talent. This is my current list, with the important proviso that the different intelligences need not, indeed usually do not, correlate. Fortunate are they who have more than three. All of them, however, can be developed, but those that are naturally there will develop faster.

**Factual Intelligence** --the know-it-all facility of the encyclopedia.

**Analytic Intelligence** --the ability to reason and to conceptualize.

**Numerate Intelligence** --being at ease with numbers of all sorts.

A combination of these first three intelligences will get you through most tests and examinations and entitle you to be called clever. But there is more to intelligence than these.

**Linguistic Intelligence** --a facility with language and languages....

**Spatial Intelligence** --an ability to see patterns in things. Artists, entrepreneurs, and system analysts have this ability, but often do poorly in tests of the first three intelligences.

**Athletic Intelligence** --although some might prefer to call it talent, the skill of athletes is a recognizable form of intelligence, still too easily dismissed as a leisure activity ....

**Intuitive Intelligence** --an aptitude for sensing and seeing what is not immediately obvious. Often opposed to analytic intelligence, making it difficult for the two to communicate ....

**Emotional Intelligence** --self-awareness and self-control, persistence, zeal, and self-motivation are often more important in life than any other faculty. Goleman quotes Aristotle: "Anyone can become angry--that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, for the right purpose, at the right time, and in the right way--this is not easy."

**Practical Intelligence** --Often called common sense, the ability to recognize what needs to be done and what can be done ....

**Interpersonal Intelligence** --the ability to get things done with and through others. Sometimes called social intelligence, or elevated to leadership skills, this intelligence is crucial to success and survival at work.

**Musical Intelligence** --easy to recognize, whether in opera singers, pianists, or pop groups, this intelligence seems pleasingly unrelated to age ....

The list could, and no doubt will, continue, because there may well be other categories of intelligence. The precise names of the various intelligences are not important. What matters is the message behind the list: that these many and varied intelligences or abilities are all resources that we can use to contribute to the world, to earn a living, and to make a difference. It cannot be proved beyond a doubt, but it is a reasonable

assumption that everyone starts off endowed to some degree with at least one of these intelligences. Nor is it obvious, looking at people in later life, that any particular set of intelligences is more important than any other. Any one of them can be developed to be the basis of self-respect, a successful life, and useful work.

It should be the first duty of a school for life to help the young person build up an "intelligence profile," then to encourage him or her to develop the preferred set of those intelligences, and to work out how best to employ them. This will provide the basis for that self-confidence without which little learning can occur. The development of the other intelligences can come later. A narrow focus on the first three intelligences in this list runs the risk of labelling as stupid those who do not shine in those particular intelligences but who have undoubted capacities in the other areas. That is to cheat them of a life.

The delivery of these first two propositions might seem very teacher intensive, focusing as they do on the unique qualities of each individual. But perhaps our teacher/student ratios are the wrong way round. Instead of focusing on individuals in the early years of life, we provide the attention [in higher education] when they really should not need it at all....

Sir Christopher Ball, the Director of Learning at the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce in London, has a neat formula for these ratios-take the age of the pupil and multiply by two. Five-year olds would then get one teacher for every ten pupils, while twenty-year-olds at university would have one teacher for every forty students, but by then they should be independent learners. There obviously can't be a straight swap of professors for primary teachers, so an initial investment will be needed at the primary end while we stretch the ratios at the university level. That stretch is going to happen anyway as the numbers attending university continue to rise, probably without any accompanying rise in resources ....

### **3. LIFE IS A MARATHON, NOT A HORSE RACE.**

In a horse race only the first three count. The rest are also-rans. In a marathon everyone who completes the course is a winner. While some run faster than others and some compete with others up at the front, most of the runners are running against themselves, seeking to better the standards which they set themselves. Life is more like a marathon for most of us. We choose which races to enter, and what pace to run at, seeking, most of the time, to better ourselves. There is ultimately no winning and losing, only the taking part, and the getting better.

Compulsory tests at seven, eleven, fourteen, and sixteen, as in Britain, turn education into a horse race, not a marathon, because the scores, however objective they are intended to be, inevitably label the young person as below or above average. Comparative grading at set ages turns education into a sorting device, not a development process. Although some may respond creatively to the news that they are below average in some aspect of their work, most young people turn away immediately to find some other area where they might have better luck, preferably one outside the remit of their school ....

If we ran our driving tests with compulsory once-only tests on everyone's seventeenth birthday, passing only those who were average or above, we should undoubtedly have safer roads with better and fewer drivers, but we would have disenfranchised, for life, nearly half the population. Yet that is what we, in Britain, are doing with our school examinations. This is immoral in a democratic society, because it deprives late

developers of the chance ....

The odd thing is that we already have a model of graded examinations in Britain which is highly regarded, one with high standards but almost universal pass rates. I refer to the system of music examinations which pupils take only when their teacher estimates that they have a good chance of passing. These examinations are not age dependent--you take them when you are ready for them. They are the appropriate examinations for a marathon as opposed to a horse race and replicate the sort of hurdles that people will encounter later in life, leaping them when they are ready for them.

Tim Brighouse, the Director of Education in Birmingham, calls these examinations "Just-in-Time Examinations." A young person should always have something to aim at, but something attainable, something retakeable, something which he or she can hold up as a mark of... achievement, irrespective of age. Adult life is not as ageist as schools are, where the month of one's birthday can be of crucial importance. These kinds of just-in-time hurdles ought to be part of the ambience in a proper school for life.

#### **4. KNOWING "WHAT" IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS KNOWING "WHERE," "HOW," AND "WHY?"**

Implicit in my education was the assumption that the objective of education and training was to fill my mind with as much information as possible, so that it would be there when I needed it. Of course, I forgot most of it. In life and in work, we learn things when we need them, not before we need them. Knowledge, for most people, has a very short sell-by date. Unless it is used very quickly it goes off. That is why it is very difficult to learn a foreign language in absentia .... If the new words and phrases do not get used within days, they evaporate.

Knowledge, these days, is readily available, whether it be contained in books and manuals, on CD-ROMs or in cyberspace, or in other people's experience. The trick is not to try to transfer it all to one's own brain, but to know where to find it, how to access it, and what to do with it when you have it. We need early practice in doing this. As part of their role as practice grounds for life, schools ought not to be force-feeding their students, but teaching them how to feed themselves. Original thought, I sometimes console myself, often goes with a bad memory. An over-stuffed brain has less need to work things out for itself.

This changes the role of the teacher. Instead of being the sole repository of knowledge, which has traditionally been the source of their authority, teachers will have to be prepared to encourage their students to search for facts and theories in the depths of the Internet, often ending up knowing more about something than the teacher. The realization that one can outgun the expert is exciting in itself for any young person, something that a self-confident teacher should take pleasure in. The real job of the teacher is to set the task which requires the search for the knowledge, to help the individual or the group to seek it out, and to demonstrate how the knowledge can be used. The Maori language, I was told, uses the same word for teaching and learning. Perhaps they know something that we have forgotten.

Some stalling skills are needed by all students, of course. A facility with words, numbers, and emotions is essential. We may not need to write, or even to type, in a future where we will talk into a computer and watch the words being spelled out in any language we choose, on the screen, but we will have to read, speak, preferably in more than one language, and be able to answer a telephone. In a digital world, where much information will come in the form of numbers, it is crucial that we are all at ease with

those numbers from an early stage, and can understand how numbers relate to each other. More importantly, we need to learn how to manage our emotions, in Daniel Goleman's sense of the word, to develop self-awareness, self-control, empathy, and the arts of listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperation. And, crucially, we need to have learned how to learn, and to enjoy the process. Schools that kill that enjoyment can damage our life chances.

Those who have the appropriate native intelligences will have an easier start, but a good school can do a lot to develop these skills and abilities in all its students, starting at a very early age. Self Science, for instance, is a core curriculum subject at one San Francisco school, tailored to helping the young students understand their feelings and how they impact...other people. In a downtown school in New Haven the Social Competence Program tries to do the same for a student body that is mostly black and Hispanic. If, however, the students can learn social competence and the other skills by using them in their normal classes while working on a task which they find fun and interesting, then the learning will be less likely to "go off"....

#### **5. SCHOOL SHOULD BE LIKE WORK, AND VICE VERSA.**

Visiting a range of schools some years back, I would often start by asking how many people worked there. I always got a response in the tens--ten or twenty, maybe, or seventy, if it was a large school. The teachers always left out the children in their counting. The children, I came to realize, were not seen as workers, but as the products of these human factories, taken in as raw material, processed, inspected, and graded, before being placed on the market.

It was a depressing thought, but it provoked me to think about what would happen if we treated the children as the real workers in an enlightened factory of creativity, with the teachers as the consultants and senior managers. Work would be organized around tasks to be done. Most of the work would be carried out in small teams or groups. There would be competition between groups but cooperation within them. The tasks would be as real as possible, but with opportunities for skill improvement and information gathering built into the timetable.

Accountability and responsibility would then become live concepts, with consequences, because it would be the students, as well as the teachers, who would have to live with those consequences. They would learn that if you turn up late for work, aren't properly prepared, or are too tired to do your best, it isn't just yourself whom you are letting down, but the whole of your group. No one is an island, maybe, but you don't believe it until you experience it.

Learning would then be seen to be the necessary ingredient for better performance on the tasks. The students would learn that it is a combination of different talents that makes things happen, and that the discovery and harnessing of these talents is critical. Older students would work with younger ones, for part of the time at least, and would have responsibilities appropriate to their relative seniority and competencies ....

The proposition that schools should be more like work organizations could and should be taken further. Work organizations now concentrate their own resources on their "core task," bringing in other specialists to do what they can do better. Schools have gone down this route only to the extent of contracting out the catering and the maintenance. They could go much further if they saw themselves, principally, as the designers and managers of a young person's development, not as the only teachers. Schools can't, and shouldn't, do everything. Practical skills such as word processing and computing,

driving, first aid, languages, home management, money management, and presentation skills, could all be done, on contract, by specialists, leaving the teachers free to concentrate on the more general education and development of the child.

Technical skills are best learned, as in Germany, in the workplace, but this can be seen as an adjunct to the school and as part of education, to be monitored and arranged by the school. The work of society, and the values and norms of the world around us are also best learned by working in and with the surrounding community, on assignments and placements arranged by the school. Turning the workplace into a school for youngsters is not always a solution welcomed by those who run the workplace, but they may come to realize that early education is better and cheaper than later remedial education. If the skills and attitudes needed for work are best learned at work, then the workplace will have to get involved, not as an ultimate destination, but as part of the learning process.

A better spread of responsibilities for schooling between work and school would allow the schools to concentrate on what they do best. Fewer core staff, better paid and achieving more, is the formula for productivity in industry, realized by getting others to do what they do better and more efficiently. If schools adopted the same formula, they could pay teachers better and see them regain the esteem which has sometimes been lacking in the recent past, because they would be doing what they alone can do--designing the development programs of their students....

#### **[6.] LEARNING IS EXPERIENCE UNDERSTOOD IN TRANQUILLITY.**

We learn by reflecting on what has happened. The process seldom works in reverse, although most educational programs assume that it does. We hope that we can teach people how to live before they live, or how to manage before they manage. Little of the teaching sticks. Simulation is the best approximation we can hope for, and where mistakes cannot be allowed it is essential. No one would want an airline pilot to fly before being trained. But no amount of role playing, case studies, or projects can compete with real life. The process of education, therefore, is fundamentally skewed. Most of it comes before, rather than after, experience. We need to build as much experience of reality as we can into schools and universities, but we must also provide more opportunities for reflective learning and requalification after school.

It doesn't end with school or...college. Life itself provides all the learning experiences we need. What is lacking is the time and place and people to help us learn from those experiences. We need to think of the whole educational system as a university of life, in which everyone is entitled to study, sometime, for free, or almost free. This is, in fact, possible in many countries, but it is not presented as a universal right. It should be, particularly as universities and colleges get more modular and globular and virtual, in the process becoming more accessible.

The big danger of a front-loading educational system is that it turns into a one-chance experience. If at first you don't succeed, you don't, usually, try again. That is particularly hard on those whose aptitudes and talents don't fit nicely into the classroom curriculum. In a credential society, where everyone will need a credential or qualification of some sort, an easy-access perpetual college system is essential, and should be made both glamorous and unthreatening.

We should, therefore, be more adventurous in our thinking. I like the idea of a University of the First Age, as pioneered in Birmingham, England, which provides out-of-school experiences and classes for young people....the work it does is more reality-

based and more unconventional than regular classroom studies. I like, too, the notion of a university of the community, in which students are apprenticed to approved non-profit organizations and earn a diploma at the end of a period of successful work, licensing them for similar work elsewhere. Here the college is the work organization and the faculty are the officers of the organization, validated and approved by an outside body. The use of the word "university" confers respectability, while the setting brings reality....

Change in the Anglo-Saxon tradition comes not by edict but by case law made fashion. There are no sure recipes, only an invitation to create new types of schools for life and work, schools that are appropriate for a new kind of world. It is a world where, more than ever before, We shall each be responsible for our own destiny, our own definition of success, our own journey of discovery.

The danger is that our traditional schools and colleges will lag behind, designed by people from a world that used to be, for a world that will be no more, rather like our armies, which were always well trained for the last war. If we fail, this time, to leap beyond our own experience, we will fail our youth. It is indeed a time for bold imaginings, for reinventing what we understand by education. It is also time to realize that there can be schools in unlikely places, places which we never thought of as schools before. Only in that way will young people acquire the self-confidence that is the prerequisite of self-respect and responsibility.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

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BY CHARLES HANDY

Charles Handy, well recognized in Britain for his management books, is the author of *The Age of Unreason*, *The Age of Paradox*, and *Beyond Certainty*. He was educated at Oxford and MIT, and has served as an executive of the Shell Oil Company and as a professor at the London Business School. From *The Hungry Spirit* by Charles Handy. Copyright 1998 by Charles Handy. Used by permission of Broadway Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

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