



School as a Weapon & Covid-19

To succeed, recognize who is not serving your interests.

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“The truth is that schools don't really teach anything except how to obey orders.”
— John Taylor Gatto

The Lie in Learning

There are three forms of education: conditioning, training, and understanding. I recently encountered an institution in which no one appreciates the difference and realized this sheds light on the pandemic confusion.

One of the courses in the clinical counselling degree program I'm finishing at Kelowna College of Professional Counselling addresses emergency response and suicide prevention. The whole program is done remotely, without any human interaction except the final review and grading of each course.

In this course, as in all others, we were asked to read a textbook, watch demonstration videos, and submit written answers and appraisals. In this case, I explored the flawed textbooks, the culturally insensitive demonstrations, and the inconsistent instructions.

My instructor, whom I've never seen, heard, nor spoken to claims to be a specialist in the field of emergency counselling. His first comment on my work was, "I am really concerned about your lack of insight and quite frankly self-serving commentary on the videos." He then gave me a grade of 68, three points above failing.

I initiated an executive review of his appraisal saying that his response was offensive, unsubstantiated, and incorrect. I went through each of his responses to demonstrate that he was incompetent as an instructor and asked for 100% full course credit.

The response to my appeal was signed by the principal, who is referred to as the executive director. He said that since the instructor was fully certified his judgements were de facto correct and there would be no adjustment. And so I realize that the field of clinical psychology is based on conditioning, not understanding.

Skepticism

"An uncertain and doubting mind leads to fresh world visions and the possibility of new and ever changing realities." — **Michael Shermer**, founder of The Skeptics Society

Science is not a thing, no assembly of things constitutes science. Science is a method based on skepticism, the questioning of assertions. The method of science questions everything admitting nothing as absolutely true.

The strength of science lies in its endless questioning. It's not what's known scientifically that's important for our understanding of our situations, it's what science does not know but allows us to consider. The scientific method encourages you to create and test novelty.

The idea that you gain a larger understanding by studying what's known is a fallacy. What's known constitutes the body of knowledge that only works sometimes. By studying what's known you are retracing what's already been found. This is useful if you want to repeat or extract something, but to understand you need to examine the edges, either the edges of what's known or the limits of their application.

Society has come to accept this insidious misconception that what is presented as scientific is true. That is absolutely not what science is about. To work correctly with scientific knowledge a culture, and everyone in it, must understand the difference between a conjecture, a hypothesis, a theory, a prediction, an observation, and a fact.

In order to manage this understanding, everyone needs to understand there is some measure of anything that we believe to be true, and this measure cannot simply be true or false. Thinking only in dichotomies leads to

intellectual blindness and inaction. The value of a dichotomy lies in the intervening space it creates. There has to be some means of moving between extremes, some way to get from having one belief to another.



Education

Schools were invented to provide a mix of conditioning, training, and understanding. Conditioning has always been primary in state-mandated education, as this is a basis for collaboration and consensus.

Training is specialized and offered selectively as not everyone has the same skills at the same time. Before the advent of a Liberal Arts education, which emphasizes understanding, education was a kind of apprenticeship in which students were expected to choose a field in which to be trained.

Understanding has a low social value for two reasons. First, in a stable and functioning system there is limited need for understanding. Second, new understanding is disruptive not only because it creates new opportunities but also because it can threaten the status quo.

In times of growth there are opportunities for understanding. In times of growth the system is configured to accept change. Because of the prosperity of Western economies in the 20th century, research institutions, like Bell Labs, were well funded. Liberal Arts education became popular for the general opportunities it made available. This is the growth stage and it's common to organisms from molds to human societies.

In times of stability with limited resources, institutions harvest opportunities for themselves. In such times, institutions discourage understanding outside of what generates a profit. This is the conservative or mature stage. It is autumnal in terms of change. It is a period of contraction.

In the late Autumnal stage, when resources become limited and the environment becomes stressed, the disruptive potential of new understanding is threatening and is discouraged. This happens at the very time novelty and insight are needed, but organizations lack insight by their nature and see novelty as a threat.

Society goes through this simple, seasonal model of expansion, coming to fruit and then contracting. But for society the timing is not governed by the sun, it's governed by the availability of resources which can be stolen, extracted, or produced.

Western society has been in its fruiting phase since the end of WWII. In this phase, education has been expansive. We're now experiencing contraction in a number of areas where resources are becoming scarce and expansion is reaching its limits. This is reflected in education as a shift from encouraging new understanding to conditioning people's thoughts and behaviors.

We like to think that our freedom, health, and understanding always expands, but this has never been the case. These things all follow the cycles of society. These phases take centuries, but we barely see these cycles because, individually, we have a poor knowledge of history.

Rather accidentally I'm reviewing details of US history that I never learned. I've found a 47-segment series of 10-minute videos called Crash Course US History, created for 5th-graders that I'm watching with my son on the streaming service CuriosityStream.com. Curiosity Stream is a substitute for YouTube that's all documentaries, high quality, no ads, and costs \$1/month.

Crash Course US History does not focus on just the "big events," it fills in the details. In this way I can see the cycles and their gradual drift from the illogical past to the illogical present. Following history without interruption at a constant level of detail makes it possible to watch the whole mess develop: politics, culture, foreign affairs, wars, social unrest, education, religion, and innovation. There is so much information, and it goes by so fast, that there is really nothing simple about this series, and while much is simplified you will be grateful for it.



Covid-19

Covid-19 has made a global appearance at a time when world culture is entering a stage of uncertain contraction. Today's superpowers vie for control of trade and resources. Contraction is focusing everyone on the same game. Contraction is happening on the largest scale.

Covid-19 is a new problem, both in detail and in scope, and this calls for new understanding at many levels: biologically microscopic, environmentally macroscopic, individual autonomy, and globally political. The threats to individuals and economies are generating reflexive contractions.

Science offers opportunities when its skeptical method is supported, but, in a restricted environment, its paths become narrow and polarized. The population has little understanding of science or skeptical inquiry. As fear grows people lean toward a phantom idea of security in the same way that everyone on a sinking boat crowds to the less flooded side.

Governments contract when under stress. Conditioned thinking becomes more dominant and questioning is curtailed. Skeptical thought becomes a threat and the fundamental mechanism of science is undermined.

This is the current environment, and the generally unconscious reaction of peoples and governments is to contract. Ironically, at the same time people have this vague notion that science, which has been profitable when allowed its method, can provide a solution without being allowed to follow its skeptical course.



School

Schools are hierarchical. They depend on a conditioned populace to believe they're necessary because they'd cease to exist if people didn't attend. They depend on teachers and administrators trained to provide services and enforce their rules. They don't need to improve themselves or understand their social function. This is always the mindset of teachers and administrators.

Schools can't create or maintain the system, but they do create the agents that run the system. They are saprophytes receiving conditioned students in exchange for training the workforce.

In a general sense, schools are propaganda factories that centralize social conditioning. Whether they're providing agents of psychological services for HMOs or revolutionary re-education for the People's Republic of China, schools provide both training and conditioning, but not understanding.

In times of turmoil, information is a weapon to condition people's thinking. We see this happening now. In the current environment no one is being trained to think or helped to understand.

This is what I encountered in my intellectually underpowered degree program, a de-evolution to authority, ignorance regarding the training of skills, and a complete absence of understanding.

The same thing is happening in the social arena. There we see figures who should have been discredited--Dr. Anthony Fauci, Medical Advisor to the President, pharmaceutical giants like Moderna, and corporate funded organizations like the World Health Organization. These remain propped up by a media that only broadcasts the party line, like the public address system from the high school of your past.

It serves little point to object to the tyrannical control of institutions because we created them for that purpose. There is nothing democratic about the corporate system, which is a winners-take-all system of cartels, profit, and expropriation. I think there is no purpose in attacking any one element of a system that has multiple supporting alliances. As my experience with the Kelowna College of Professional Counselling shows, there is little point even in arguing.

This school, like all schools, is founded to provide a minimal level of training barely sufficient in good times, and inadequate in times of change. The structure of an institution does not evolve, just as our structure as individuals does not evolve in our lifetimes. There are only certain parts of any system that are designed to change, and those parts cost a lot of energy to maintain.

Change



If you want to create or follow change, then recognize those parts of the system that can change. Don't park yourself behind an immovable wall and yell at it. While even mountains are eventually worn down, they're not worn down in your lifetime!

Not all people are equally emotionally or intellectually flexible. It's strange to recognize that the emotional and intellectual investments many people have made limit the kinds of thoughts they can have. This is the classic problem of knowing how other people think, which we side-step by assuming we all think alike: the fallacy of the commons.

Do not think you'll change the world by fighting an intransigent person or institution. You may make a dent, you might even make a hole, but unless you change the whole system those bruises will just heal over time and the individual or institution will return to their former state.

The Kelowna College Of Professional Counselling, and all those invested in it, will not change until the ecology in which they operate changes. This is somewhat depressing for those of us who are stuck on, or invested in, a sinking system. I take

it as a given that those of us who exist between two worlds must accept an unsatisfactory middle ground until we can move to a better location.

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