Experience as a Learning Form

A Class Conscious Narrative

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Using institutional ethnography and narrative, this analysis exposes the role of schools and teachers in serving students, their families and communities. The analysis explores the extent to which academic learning is privileged and the pros and cons of such privilege. The author balances a traditional and non-traditional research design that opens a dialogue about how teachers and students cope within stigmatized programs. The movement by governments to 'bottle' a curriculum to nurture a generation of creative people, serves as a backdrop. Slojd and crafts teachers are exalted for using a more authentic pedagogical form compared to their academic counterparts. The author's autobiographical account as a university teacher educator sets the stage for a more complete representation of what is really going on in schools under the long arm of government.

Keywords: experiential learning, narrative inquiry, cultural capital, colonialist policy, human creativity

Introduction

> As I reflect on my life as a working class family member who became engaged/entangled with the middle class profession of teaching I am struck by the conviction I have for my working class roots. There is no single starting point to this evolving story but visiting schools and completing research in Europe, particularly in the Nordic countries, definitely propelled my thinking as well as the insight needed to explain/expose the role schools and teachers play in the lives of youth from different classes and cultures.

The mental capital that comes from craft, design, art and technology is not well documented in the education literature (DeVries, 2006; Gulliksen, 2014; Hansen, 2008; Staples, 2008). Learning in these subjects, we do know, is highly valued by instructors. We also know that these courses are less resourced than formal academic courses, perhaps more so outside of the Nordic countries. Several program areas in our secondary schools, e.g., the arts, technological studies, crafts and design, physical education, home and family studies, drama and performance, music, are less privileged than academic studies. These areas of the curriculum are relegated to the basement and wings of our buildings in favour of the university preparation state prescribed curriculum.

The education research and policy apparatus itself may be directly associated with this justice/injustice (Lagemann, 1997). To transcend or question the formal education establishment, however, is to be bold, political, and candid. How does this curriculum disparity happen? Many scholars have attempted to answer the question with mixed results (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1993; Lindeman, 1926; Rogers, 1997; Schwab, 1972). Freire's answer is particularly bold: "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppressed them'." (Simone de Beauvoir - cited in Freire 1970, p. 60). Applying Freire's ideas to curriculum innovation in today's public school systems is a daunting but timely case in point which is described later.

The aim and purpose of this narrative and reflection is to start a dialogue about, and analysis of, formal learning, and the research apparatus that informs analysis in public education. A secondary purpose is to challenge an apparent world-wide movement to develop a curriculum for fostering creativity among

youth.[1]. The immediate inspiration comes from a NORDFO conference (2016) in Rauma Finland titled 'Make it Now'.

There are two ways to assess or measure the mental, physical, and/or social capital associated with schooling. The first is to rely on the knowledge generated by scholars in the disciplines. Sociology and economics, for example, often look at formal education as a focus of analysis. The second is to rely on the knowledge we gain from life and work experience (i.e., our own knowledge). Often this second way of assessing capital, or anything for that matter, is frowned upon by traditional science. Yet, the insights and findings associated with this second form of analysis are often more helpful for both practice and scholarship in education (Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Hansen, 2008). The author proposes to balance a 'discipline-based' and 'experience-first' approach in this article.

The Determinants of Human Capital

Sociologists have a long and distinguished base of theoretical knowledge that purports to explain the role of schools in society (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). There are different camps among scholars in the sociology of education – structural functionalists (Bowles, 2013), conflict theory (Young, 1971), and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Functionalists believe that schools shape society by establishing norms, customs, and traditions of behaviour. Critics argue that this theory fails to account for a sense of agency, that individuals are puppets, acting as their role requires. Conflict theorists believe social reproduction (schools provide the means for kids to achieve economic and social success) continues to occur because the whole education system is overlain with ideology, provided by the dominant group. In effect, they perpetuate the myth that education is available to all to provide a means of achieving wealth and status. Anyone who fails to achieve this goal, according to the myth, has only themselves to blame. This duplicity/deception is so normalized that many parents endure less than fulfilling jobs for many years, believing that such sacrifice will enable their children to have opportunities in life that they did not have. These people are victims of a societal hoax/trick of sorts. They have been encouraged to believe that a major goal of schooling is to strengthen equality and opportunity while, in reality, schools reflect society's intention to maintain the unequal distribution of status and power (Fitzgerald, 1994).

The sociology of knowledge, a subset of the sociology of education discipline, is relevant here. Its proponents (Cole, 2002; Rogers, 1997; Stark, 1971; Young, 2007) look at the fact that much of knowledge in schools is constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1976), particularly in secondary and tertiary education. This body of research looks at the validity and verification of knowledge as the featured commodity of schools. Rogers (1997) in her paper on new views of knowledge and its representation in schools, illustrates the differences between subject matter learning and disciplinary learning. She explores some of the problems posed by using the disciplines as the primary source of authority in shaping the curriculum, and goes on to propose an alternative model. The alternative integrates the influence of the disciplines with other influences such as the child's world, the particulars of context, and the knowledge of professions. She argues we should think more broadly about the possible sources of influence and authority for the curriculum in schools[2].

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[1] Government education departments around the world are developing curriculum units to teach children how to become more creative. The fervor for innovation is driven by global economics but also by the belief that a whole generation of youth can be taught to be creative through schools. This is based on the belief that creativity as a concept can be 'bottled' so to speak. The Human Ingenuity Research Group questions such a direction (see www.edu.uwo.ca/HIRG). The group's premise is that the determinants of creativity are best sought in the many community, domestic, and natural environments children experience as they mature in the formative years.

[2] Curriculum theory is moribund (Schwab, 1972, Bernstein, 1971). This statement marks a turning point in the evolution of education as a discipline. The 60's and 70's had been full of optimism and bravado for people in the education professions. Jobs were plentiful. Teachers colleges were being appended to university institutions. The battle educators had waged to become a recognized discipline in the scientific community and in the universities seemed winnable. Forty years later the optimism has changed to pessimism. Learning and schooling are used synonymously. Both are ubiquitous concepts. Faculties of Education are under continued scrutiny by scholars inside and outside the field, not to mention university leaders.

The economics of education is the study of economic issues relating to education, including the demand for education and the financing and provision of it (Blaug 1985; Weil 2009). Economists are interested in the rate of return on investment in human and physical capital. Human capital theory (Schultz, 1971) is cited as the basis for calculating the rate of return. HCT presumes that formal education generates economic growth. HCT critics, Berg (1970), among others, suggest otherwise. Berg asserts that formal education levels are not a good predictor of human productivity and economic wealth at all, individual or collective. HCT critics believe richer households seek out educational attainment as a symbol of status, rather than wealth. They [economists] reason very objectively that rate of return must consider both the earning power that comes from education but also the opportunity costs of forgone earnings as students cannot work while studying. Both of these are factored over the time frame of a career or era. Economists also look at what they call 'externalities' (e.g., negative outcomes from schooling). One example would be those for whom formal school detracted from a fulfilling career or led to poor self-esteem.

An alternative model of looking at the demand for education is referred to as 'screening'. It is based on the theory of signaling (Horner, 2008). The central idea behind signaling is that successful completion of education is a signal of ability. In this model the formal education system is assumed to be a 'screening' device that business, industry and government can depend on for identifying and recruiting talent for their ranks. If the screening or signaling hypothesis is to be believed the alleged less talented students with interests and abilities in other areas (e.g., technology and the arts) should have spent their time more wisely in some other sector or considered on the job experience. Once again the explanatory power of economic theory is interesting but limited.

More recent studies (Kling, & Merrifield, 2009) indicate that educational advancement is definitely not the only variable for predicting economic growth. Their longitudinal analysis shows that only 14% of the average annual increase in labour productivity between 1915 and 2005 can be explained by increased education levels of the general population. These economists believe that in today's world many skills and capabilities come by way of learning outside of traditional education, or outside of schooling altogether.

Studies completed by economists interested in rate of return on education, in short, are inconclusive. There may be too many fallacies in the economics of education knowledge base to rely on it solely for evaluating what causes or doesn't cause what. It may be that the rush to credentialism (Dore, 1980; Collins, 1976) has misled students and policy makers whose goal is to rationalize formal education, at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Studies which attempt to break down the relative value of some forms of learning and subject matter over others, are just beginning to appear in the literature (Gulliksen, 2015; Hansen & Dishke-Hondzel, 2014).

A Simpler Discourse

A simpler discourse on the mental, physical, and social capital associated with learning in schools is possible when teachers' lives are recounted. Life story research uses the process of reflective autobiography as a means of making sense of a problem or ambiguity. It acknowledges, according to Tripp (1993), the 'critical incidents' which influence and develop awareness of one's disposition, both toward teaching, the nature of the subjects themselves, and the role of the school. The autobiographical process fosters reflection upon one's own enculturation. More important, it informs scholarship.

Understanding the role of schools using narrative (Polkinghorne, 2000) and institutional ethnography (Smith, D. 2005; Wolcott, 1985), in tandem, fits the need (i.e., the search for insight). Narrative involves the territory between the author's reflections and reality. Narrating one's own experience, the author

contends, informs analysis about the larger purpose of learning in formal institutions, as much if not more, than the traditional university disciplines.

There is a broader social and political context. Predictably, curriculum reform efforts today are couched in school performance terms rather than the human development needs of young people. How can student performance be improved, and how can accountability be assured? Most school system responses falls into a 'more-of-the-same' category, followed by more testing, standardization across schools, and rhetoric about equity. Debate as to how the school and school curriculum is poised or not poised to meet the skill needs of the new economy, for example, takes precedence, especially in North America, but also in Europe. Central to understanding the debate, but overlooked, is the looming 'program equity' problem (Hansen, 2004) between practical and general studies. In this context, the importance and place of technical education, or any practical subject for that matter, remains obscure. The status of those program areas is diminished.

> Using a cultural lens and personal experience I propose to expose the assumptions underlying government schooling by looking at the 'schooling way' more closely. The determinants of children's creativity/ingenuity, and current policy initiatives to achieve/produce a generation of creative youth, offers a backdrop for the analysis. To question government assumptions and premises about learning, and schooling, is intended to be creative in a critical sense (Glaveanu, 2010). Can the traditional way of thinking about our work and learning as educators be artfully dissected? Can a new set of assumptions in education be put forward? What are the fallacies associated with government attempts to teach creativity through the current curriculum?

The evidence for needing to clarify the role of schooling can be found in the awkward position that schools, and the subjects promoted within them, find themselves. Meaningful learning, according to an increasing number of national education reports, is extensively based in experience or action where students are self-directed. This narrative inquiry helps expose the assumptions which displace and diminish life experience and help clarify what is actually going on.

> Equity issues typically focus on gender, race, and class. Individual cases of prejudice or bias are seen and heard about all the time in the news. Seldom though, do analysts look at prejudice and bias in our systems and institutions. Nor, do they realize their own socialization. They [our schools] are supposed to represent the home of egalitarianism, good will, public policy and are thought, by many, to be beyond reproach. But are they? These institutions are governed by laws and regulations that seldom change and are immune to scrutiny. Government offices (health, education, justice) seem incapable of recognizing prejudice because systems that are geared to serve social purposes focus on the successes not the failures. Those for whom the process doesn't work – the oppressed you might say – are overlooked or forgotten. One's gain is at the expense of the other.

> Inflicting class values, it occurs to me, on large numbers of society is not new. Colonialist ideas and practices have dominated many countries whose development traces to the 19th and 20th centuries. Such policies and practices are pervasive and invisible – a double impact. How does this happen you ask? Because once in place the values that forged the system are perpetuated by the institution that is least likely to change them – the school. A primary example of this indoctrination can be seen in the residential school system that was designed and implemented in Canada for first nations and recently criticized. I will expand on this point later.

In the case of Canada, students who find academic learning difficult or cumbersome are shunted into less resourced and stigmatized programs where they may or may not belong (Hansen, 2002; King, 2005). Once there, they find out about segregation and what it means to be relegated to a lower status program. The stigma festers in silence but reaches everyone in the program, including students, teachers, and parents. Why and how this happens is explained partially by sociology and economics scholarship already covered. Within and across programs, however, this institutional behavior has a downside that is especially elusive. Program politics notwithstanding, the prejudices and havoc traceable to our formal

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education institutions are seldom challenged, much less exposed. Yet, when one considers the reverence bestowed on public education by analysts, Freire and other critical scholars excepted, the picture starts to take shape. It [the injustice] is interesting in magnitude, nature, and volition.

The Academic Studies Myth Explained

The fundamental notion that sustains formal education is that assimilation into society via academic achievement is best for everyone. This colonialist assertion is seldom challenged except by outsiders. One such challenge is documented by a scholar from the field of adult education. Lindeman (1961) explains in his classic book 'The meaning of adult education' how schools have vulgarized learning:

> If people are not to fall into the pitfalls which have vulgarized public education, caution must be exercised…. For example, once the assumption is made that human nature is uniform, common and static – that all human beings will find meaning in identical goals, ends or aims - the standardizing process begins: teachers are trained according to orthodox and regulated methods; they teach prescribed subjects to large classes of children who must all pass the same examination; in short, if we accept the standard of uniformity, it follows that we expect, e.g., mathematics, to mean as much to one student as to another. Teaching methods which proceed from this assumption must necessarily become autocratic; if we assume that all values and meanings apply equally to all persons, we may then justify ourselves in using a forcing-method of teaching. On the other hand, if we take for granted that human nature is varied, changing and fluid, we will know that life's meanings are conditioned by the individual. We will then entertain a new respect for personality (p. 11).

A second complimentary body of research (Fuller, 2009) looks at the importance of understanding the ways that individuals identify within an academic discourse, one that typically situates young people dichotomously; as those who will achieve and those who will not. Understanding the importance of self-efficacy, confidence, and resilience in shaping educational identity/habitus at the level of agent and subsequently, educational attainment and aspirations, is central to one's adjustment in and outside of schools, in Fuller's view.

A concise and critical analysis of institutionalized learning poses a unique meta-problem. Education research itself is often restricted in its capacity to question and review the enterprise. Our institutional ways are cherished but they may limit the outreach necessary to move forward, according to Smith (2005). Should our institutions, as instruments of the government, be scrutinized? Can they be? Is there a research design that can cut through the latent functions (confinement, conformity, standardization) that formal education often conceals as one of its social/economic purposes and constructively change them? Can the formal education system be re-imagined and re-calibrated to be structurally inclusive?

> My own experience and working class roots, not to mention the years of confusion with school life, in retrospect, made me skeptical of the academic way. Of course I am grateful to be educated formally but now ask myself – did I miss something by not following my own instincts and tendencies for learning? Flipping the academic pedagogy up-side-down may be the only way to scrutinize this systemic giant. And, it is not easy to do for those who have been successful with academic learning. I had no reason at the time of my schooling to question what seemed to be a universal, albeit perplexing, process. In hindsight the purpose of formal education in its early days was to eradicate illiteracy but it was also designed to ensure social conformity and compliance. Fuller (2009) questions an education system that privileges academic learning over other forms. It certainly seems wrong-headed to me. And, if it is wrong-headed, don't we need to ask why. It is, after-all, our nature as human beings to inquire. That's it! Learning is second nature to us - as children, as family members, as community stewards? We know of the disconnect but defer to institutions for confirmation. And, the confirmation never comes.

Another backdrop for scrutinizing the formal education enterprise is the recent intent by government leaders and parties to design and deliver a curriculum that will magically transform all of its young to be creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Ken Robinson's (2006) attack on formal school learning provides some enlightenment. He asks: How are we supposed to nurture a generation of creative thinking youth

if they are being conditioned to think in one formal and narrow way? And, if Lindeman is to be believed, is it an adult way that perpetuates this thinking, thereby making it impervious to change. Recent field study and experience on human ingenuity (www.edu.uwo.ca/hirg) suggests formal learning environments often stifle learning and creativity, much as Robinson and Lindeman conclude.

So, what social mechanisms work for, or against, the integration and equal acceptance of other forms of learning in our institutions? Asking the question is a start. The answer may help us come out from the shadow that the academic way has cast on educators and generations of youth. The need is to light up the obscurities such as compliance, conformity, and institutional bias, among others. And, what is it about the lower status courses in secondary schools? While these subjects have been low profile program areas in the larger scheme of contested curriculum policy, they have one interesting and compelling characteristic. Pedagogically speaking, they represent instruction and practice that is problem, not subject-based. Most academic curriculum is subject-based. It is contrived you might say in two ways: The need, according to curriculum experts (Eisner, 1998), is to address deficits in the pursuit of highly valued subject matter – mathematical rules and principles for example. Secondly, the need from a government perspective is to achieve a prosperous and sustainable economy. Students are assumed to be missing a body of knowledge that is deemed to be important. But, are these needs real or artificially constructed? Missing from our analysis is a more aggressive stance on the general landscape in the field of formal education itself. Once the assumptions about formal institutionalized learning are exposed some debate and analysis is possible. It may be that the public has been much too polite and passive in its acceptance of formal institutionalized learning. A Freireian approach would raise the consciousness of the oppressed and move on!

Moving Forward (Cultural vs. Human Capital)

There is a small tide of ideas and concepts that are promising. They all point to an 'activity and place-based pedagogy' (Sobel, 1993; Gruenewald, 2003) in apposition to a pedagogy of compliance and conformity (Dishke & Hansen, 2015; Gamble, 2001). If Sobel and Gruenewald are right about the need for schools to be driven by community development rather than national global agendas, then provincial, state, and national governments may need to re-visit their fundamental beliefs and dreams about human capital. Instead of treating people as a resource that just needs to be better trained on how to think and solve problems, a different approach may be necessary. That new approach would be to value and celebrate a 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1996) based on a collective of geographical, resource, and human uniqueness.

Forcing children to learn through a structured curriculum (Donaldson, 1978) contradicts what we know about the determinants of children's development. Children, we are starting to understand and concede, need natural environments and a balance of structured and unstructured learning opportunities (Strauss, 2015). The Norwegians call this 'uteskole'. It means learning through nature and place-based learning. The Norwegian concept 'Friluftsliv' applies as well.[3]

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[3] Curriculum theory is moribund (Schwab, 1972, Bernstein, 1971). This statement marks a turning point in the evolution of education as a discipline. The 60's and 70's had been full of optimism and bravado for people in the education professions. Jobs were plentiful. Teachers colleges were being appended to university institutions. The battle educators had waged to become a recognized discipline in the scientific community and in the universities seemed winnable. Forty years later the optimism has changed to pessimism. Learning and schooling are used synonymously. Both are ubiquitous concepts. Faculties of Education are under continued scrutiny by scholars inside and outside the field, not to mention university leaders.

A concurrent and timely case of forced, some would say incarcerated, learning has received media and critical analysis in Canada. It involves the residential school system (150 institutions) implanted across Canada at the turn of the last century to colonize first nations children. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2010) has drawn considerable attention in Canada and beyond. The following excerpt from Samantha Helen Spady's thesis (2013) on the subject exposes the problems associated with acknowledging bias when it is institutionalized. The ongoing violation of the human rights of indigenous children and youth is documented in her thesis report:

> I argue that this discourse [we know what is best for you] invites Canadians into a position of racial superiority that manifests itself in many different ways. Whether Canadians responded in humanitarian gestures of charity and concern for the community, or with anger and accusations of band corruption, these sentiments are rooted in the racial construction of Canada as a white settler society. I trace how this racial imaginary builds the nation on stolen land, and obscures historical and ongoing contemporary relationships of dispossession and violence that contradict national mythologies of Canadian goodness, peacefulness and racial tolerance. This thesis argues that through the construction of Indigenous emergency, a racialized national imaginary is created, sustaining exploitation of resources and dispossession of land (p. 151).

Joe Sheridan (2000) cogently presented a similar argument in his article 'The Silence in Alphabet Soup'. As consumers of learning in formal institutions we must listen to and support Indigenous peoples in ending the ongoing violation of their human rights. To be proactive in demanding that the rights of Indigenous peoples be promoted and protected, informs and illuminates. It helps us understand and identify how we best convey this message while respecting the knowledge and leadership of not only Indigenous peoples but our own knowledge, working vs. middle class.

Bourdieu's Analysis

Another way to frame the analysis of government policy about learning, schooling, and its foundation or structure, is to look at the literature on 'critical theory' or critical analysis. Bourdieu coined the term 'cultural capital' (non-financial social assets such as education, speech, dress, physical appearance) in his lucid writing about education. His perspective reveals how structures play an important role in determining individual achievement in school, but fails to allow for the exercise of individual agency. Using the concept of habitus (embodied and socially shaped dispositions, tendencies, abstract mental habits, feelings, and actions), Bourdieu believes that one's class position alone does not determine one's life chances, although it does play an important part, alongside other factors. To gain capital and qualifications (educational credentials) students must acquire legitimate status by exchanging their own (often working-class) cultural capital. This exchange is not straight forward, due to the class ethos of the lower-class students. Class ethos is described as the particular disposition towards, and subjective expectations of, school and culture. It is in part determined by the objective chances of that class. This means that not only do working class children find success harder in school due to the fact that they must learn a new way of 'being' or relating to the world, and especially, a new way of relating to and using language, but they must also act against their instincts and expectations. For the majority of these students who do succeed at school, they have had to internalize the values of the dominant classes and use them as their own, to the detriment of their original habitus and cultural values.

> My own journey corresponds to this description of social mobility except that Bourdieu's explanations miss the chronic struggle between academic and non-academic language/culture that, in my case, caused recurring confusion and anxiety. It took years of formal education and credential accumulation, and years of life and work experience for me to find peace and perspective. I recall drawing my adult education students to a comparison illustrated by Knowles (1978). His analysis showed two learning curves - one associated with institutionalized learning, the other, life-course learning. The two curves intersect, in the mid-forties for most adults. The turning point for me was age forty six. From that point on in my professional and personal life I trusted my experiential learning over my formal learning and do so to this day. Bourdieu would probably say I failed to make the adjustment from working to middle class. My

response, 'thank goodness'. Overall, I feel self actualized and cherish my working class roots more than I do any middle class values/views that were intended for me.

This personal anecdote is not meant to be generalized. It aims to understand current policy/practice and spawn debate. When we 'school' children, the intervention socially speaking is significant. 'Getting it right' is crucial!

> The social equality purposes of schooling raise a question that is seldom asked, it occurs to me. Why would an institution set out to create these value systems as polar opposites and profess to reduce the gap between the working and middle class? Seeking clarity of social mobility may be unnecessarily complex. Shouldn't schools be celebrating the values of all classes rather than diminishing some at the expense of others? Or, is the social purpose of schooling just rhetoric? It would seem that government should be sure its assumptions are beyond reproach and scrutiny before institutionalizing them.

One simple carryover from everyone's days in school is the fact that some children/adolescents are considered more able than others; yes, those students who get rewarded and applauded on national tests and at graduation time. Somehow the practice of distinguishing some students over others, i.e., screening out the high achievers in school, is taken as a given, a symbol of system success. Parents endorse the process as a rite of passage that they themselves endured, so, it must be okay. Seldom is distinguishing one student or group from another identified as prejudicial, or morally wrong. Yet, when the process is institutionalized it becomes an entrenched form of discrimination – one that is impossible to challenge or penetrate. Governments and professional associations prioritize school subjects in the curriculum. Discursive learning is deemed superior to other forms of learning. It reigns supreme. In fact, there is precious little effort given to a comparative analysis. As such, subjects like art, tech, business studies, physical education, home economics, and music are stigmatized. The assumptions and the biases become clearer here. 'Academic learning is privileged over other forms because it is superior, de facto, it is in the best interests of society and government to exalt it! If scrutinized from a different perspective, one begins to see that such exclusivity is not necessarily in the public interest, and diminishes, as much as it enhances, individuals and the communities in which they reside.

> In my own life I felt uneasy in my early years of school but was unable to express myself. I knew something was not right but had no words and not enough experience to know what was happening. Now, thanks to Bourdieu and others it would seem I was a working class kid adjusting to a very formal school, one goal of which was to instill middle class values. In retrospect, my working class morals were being undervalued in favour of a government vision for a prosperous and more educated society, defined then and now as middle class and 'best'. This revelation, which took 40 years to unveil itself, is unsettling. To now have an explanation of such institutional behaviour/purpose is helpful to some extent, but there are lingering questions. I do feel released from the conditioning but compelled to address the public's less than complete understanding/appetite for what is really going on in the public schools. Can the screening function of schooling be explained in a simple way for all to understand? Can privileging some forms of learning over others be justified/changed?

If we accept the position that schools should serve the development needs of children and the communities in which they reside, how is the screening function of schooling to be viewed? Is the role of schools as instruments of government and corporations valid? If not, what is the root belief that should govern our institutions? The author believes that being 'school smart' or 'smart in school' is trumped by being experiential/self-determined. The former is thought to be a better indicator of leadership potential; and a measurable paper and pencil academic curriculum which grows out of the university disciplines, is the best approach to achieving that purpose. Many critics of formal education have challenged this fundamental belief but with little success (Bowles, Gintis, & Osborne, 2005; Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1938; Gruenewald, 2003; Schwab, 1972; Mead, 1961; McLaren, 2003). A more complete and authentic set of assumptions may be emerging though.

Epilogue

To digest the argument that governments have a misdirected instrumentalist tendency and zeal for prosperity, one must have an open mind. John Cobb Jr. (2015), in a paper entitled 'Whitehead as an ecological alternative to scientific materialism', makes the case for an alternative authority for the state curriculum. He calls for an ecological civilization. Among other things he argues that "Unless science subordinates itself to the quest for wisdom, it must accept continuing responsibility for destroying the civilization it claims to advance." Cobb draws on the scholarship of Alfred North Whitehead to do this. Whitehead's assumption is that nature is the higher order source of knowledge and power to which human beings should subordinate, not the constructed university disciplines.

> Adopting wisdom and its associated knowledge of nature as a higher authority for schooling is compelling. But would that lead to the use of 'experience first' principles in the curriculum? I doubt it. The influence of nature on our learning is profound and self-evident. Equally compelling is the distinction between working and middle class values. People of different colours, class, and callings are equal in nature's domain. Finally, compliance on its own is not a completely negative or derogatory concept. It only becomes so when it is instituted (enshrined) in practice and policy.

> In my mind, something happened on our watch as baby boomers. As an early baby boomer I feel used by government, via my parents. The collective 'act' was delicate. It wasn't thought to have any backlash or consequence. What happened is only now possible to understand. Government framed illiteracy at the turn of the last century as a problem that only formal schooling could solve. We [baby boomers] were taught to put our faith in knowledge ahead of experience! In hindsight though there was a risk or consequence that wasn't identified, much less offset. Our boomer generation was the test group for a critical social experiment; an experiment that has ever so subtly shifted our belief in, and trust for, our own knowledge and experience. Every child, for whom the academic approach failed at the hands of a well-meaning middle class public school teacher, endured too much embarrassment! Compared to the achievement orientated youth in schools, the alienated have been forgotten; foolishly I suggest. Assuming working class members are significant in magnitude and relevant culturally/economically as I do, it is time to analyze and debate the risks/rewards associated with that social experiment.

Experience and one's trust in it serves as a psychological force in every person's learning. This personal force is central to meaningful learning and human growth. Remove it or diminish it, as we tend to do in schools for half the children, and you stifle instead of nurture both learning and human development! Samuel Taylor Coleridge (cited in Byrne, 1994) wrote: "If you break the bond with nature you risk chaos". There is an important parallel for us in schools. If you break the bond with experience you risk delusion and alienation.

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Ronald Hansen, Professor Emeritus Professor Hansen's research explores the relative value of practical experience in apposition to academic learning. In a policy development context these two forms of learning are critical to curriculum designs for institutions and the people who inhabit them. Through the Human Ingenuity Research Group (HIRG) professor Hansen proposes fresh perspectives and policies on higher education, particularly learning in the trades, technical occupations, design and engineering.