“The Predicament of Secondary Education”

John Abbott
Author of *Overschooled but Undereducated: Society’s failure to understand adolescence* and President, The 21st Century Learning Initiative

Supporting documentation for this discussion can be downloaded from the Initiative’s

Website : [www.21learn.org](http://www.21learn.org)
Email: mail@21learn.org
UK contacts: jabbott@rmplc.co.uk
Telephone: +44 (0) 1225 333376
Fax: +44 (0) 1225 339133

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Predicament: a difficult, unpleasant or embarrassing situation

This is not just an English predicament; the U.S. Excellency Report of 1983 into the state of high school education warned that this was so bad that “If an enemy had done this we would have declared it to be an act of war”.

To which Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation, replied “To blame schools for the rising tide of mediocrity is to confuse symptoms with disease. Schools can rise no higher than the expectations of the communities that surround them.”
Understand this; What children think, and do, is progressively influenced as they get older by the values and assumptions they absorb, largely subconsciously, from the people amongst whom they live. The research is pretty conclusive; schools can, in the short term, improve a child’s performance and behaviour, but once that intervention ceases the child quickly reverts to what influences him or her most – namely the values, ideas and aspirations of family, peer group and community.
“How the well-being of British children compares”

Unicef used six categories to judge young people in 21 countries

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England slides down world literacy league

British primary school pupils slipped from third place in 2001 to 19th place last year in the authoritative study of 45 countries and provinces made by the OECD. A week later it was announced:

Teenagers ignorant about world

British school children are bottom of the class when it comes to international awareness. A poll of 11-16-year-olds in ten countries found that British youngsters were the least likely to make the effort to understand current events in the world or to learn a foreign language. “Our school children cannot afford to fall behind the rest of the world”, said the British Council representative. “For the U.K. to compete in a global economy, it is vital we encourage our young people to have an interest in the world around them”.

The 21st Century Learning Initiative www.21learn.org
“Affluenza” by Oliver James, Vermillion 2007

Definition: “Affluenza, a contagious middle-class virus causing depression, anxiety, addiction and enui”

An epidemic of ‘affluenza’ is sweeping through the English-speaking world — an obsessive, envious, keeping-up-with-the-Jones — that makes us twice as prone to depression, anxiety and addictions than people in other developed nations. And now we are infecting the rest of the world with this virulent virus.

In this colourful and eloquent account, James reveals how issues like consumerism, raising children, appearances, property fever and the battle of the sexes vary across societies with different governments, values, beliefs and traditions. And in doing so, leads us to an unavoidable and potentially life-changing conclusion: that to ensure our mental health we can and must pursue our needs rather than our wants.
“If only the parents cared more for their children...”
“I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly [disrespectful] and impatient of restraint.”
Go back 2 or 3 generations to the concept of The All-round Person

Parents feel that years spent by their children at school, almost irrespective of the subjects which they study, will contribute powerfully to the making of the man. But intellectual training by itself is no more than part of the necessary preparation for maturity. “In our concentration on academic performance we lose sight of our main business of educating human personality” (TES September 1959).

The present curriculum is at fault because it lacks any such moral purpose. All considerations of the curriculum should consider “how best to use subjects for the purpose of education… rather than regarding education as the by-product of the efficient teaching of subjects” (Sir Philip Morris, 1952).
A View from 1962
Why is there a contrast between the splendid exteriors of our new schools, and the inadequacy of so much that goes on inside?

- How far has a child been enabled to develop his own personality?
- Is our education an adequate preparation for becoming a good citizen?
- Is the present system of physical education satisfactory?
- What contribution can education make to the responsibilities in the home?
- How effectively can the school-leaver communicate?
- How skillful is a child when he leaves school?
- How well equipped is a child when he leaves school to become a self-supporting member of the community?
Pace of Change

In a Times leader of April 1971 it was reported that there was a "lack of enthusiasm for wealth as such" in Britain. The article concluded: "The secret hope of Britain is indeed that the monetary obsession has penetrated our society less deeply than it has others. There are probably still more people in Britain who will give total effort for reasons of idealism than for reasons of gain".

- In 1969 38% of married mothers worked for pay. In 1999 it was 70%.
- In 1968 75% of college freshmen claimed that "developing a meaningful philosophy of life [was] very important." By 1999 "being well off financially" was the expectation of 75% of all freshmen.
The Central Paradox. Most of us are earning more money and living better than we (or our parents) did a quarter of a century ago around the time when some of those technologies on which the new economy is based - the micro chip, the personal computer, the internet - first emerged. You'd think, therefore, that it would be easier, not harder, to attend to the part of our lives that exists outside paid work. Yet by most measures we're working longer and more frantically than before, and the time and energy for our non-working lives are evaporating.

In 1984, in *The Future of Work*, Charles Handy noted that, in the first part of the 20th century, industrial workers laboured for about 100,000 hours in a lifetime (47 hours a week, for 47 weeks in a year, for 47 years). This, he noted, had already dropped to about 75,000 hours in the early 1980s, and he predicted that it would likely fall to a 50,000 hour lifetime of labour by the early 1990s, with most people working a 32 hour week for 45 weeks in a year for 35 years. What has gone wrong with his prediction?
An English response to the UNICEF Report on Children’s Well-being

The shocking indictment of English society contained in the UNICEF Report, is a direct consequence of Britain having adopted a consumerist philosophy. We now treat children, as we treat each other, not as pilgrims but as customers. It may have made many rich beyond their dreams, but it has impoverished our national life. Conned into thinking that happiness comes with the ability to buy more and more, parents have been persuaded to work ever longer hours which has led to the progressive destruction of family life, while the adulation of individual rights has emasculated communities. As a panic measure schools have been given the impossible task of picking up what was earlier the educative role of the family and the community. At the same time the curriculum has become a preparation for consumerism, rather than the means to achieve sustainability.

It is not our children’s’ fault that they are screwed up, it is ours, (all of us, private individuals, institutions as well as an over-bearing government) simply because we have become satiated with an altogether too mean an understanding of what life is all about.
England’s preoccupation with what can easily be measured has lead to pupils being ‘spoon-fed’ to pass exams instead of developing knowledge, and understanding, a report from the Oxford University Educational Studies Department announced on 8th February 2006. It claims that essentials have been removed from many subjects, and the government changes in ‘A level’ have resulted in ‘bite-size’ chunks of knowledge, with students who ‘want to learn and forget’, rather than ‘learn and know’. Students now arrive at university, often with top grades, but lacking independent thought, have a fear of numbers and prefer the internet to books. Advance study in school, the report states, needs to stress the ability to read critically; to communicate ideas in writing using appropriate and grammatically correct language, and to argue a case. “What tutors are looking for is really quite simply students who are committed to studying a subject, engage critically with ideas, prepare to take some intellectual risks, are able to use a range of skills to develop arguments”.

The Daily Telegraph
The dangers of good teaching: 1927

The more accomplished a teacher is in the art of lecturing or coaching, the worse he is as an educator. Working on the old-fashioned system, the clever teacher (deplorable paradox!) does almost more harm than the stupid one. For the clever schoolmaster makes things too easy for his pupils; he relieves them of the necessity of finding out things for themselves. **By dint of brilliant teaching he succeeds in almost eliminating the learning process.** He knows how to fill his pupils
with ready-made knowledge, which they inevitably forget (since it is not their knowledge and cost them nothing to acquire) as soon as the examination for which it was required is safely passed. The stupid teacher, on the other hand, may be so completely intolerable that the child will perhaps be driven, despairingly and in mere self-defence, to educate himself; in which case the incompetent shepherd will have done, all unwittingly, a great service to his charge, by forcing him into a rebellious intellectual independence.

Aldous Huxley, *The Dangers of Good Teaching* 1927
"Thus, the task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what nobody yet has thought about that which everybody sees."

Schopenhauer
What was your most powerful learning experience?

and

How did this shape the way you think about your own learning?
“Learning and schooling are not synonymous”
Traditionally, Education has often been likened to a three-legged stool, which will always adjust to the most uneven surface (unlike a four-legged chair)

The Home (Emotions)
The Community (Inspiration)
The School (Intellectual)

Progressively, however, modern society has attempted to define Education as Schooling and has defined schools as having a similar three parts — Academic, Socialisation and Control.
Performability
(Management by Objectives)

Does this mean Delegation or Subsidiarity
How can you ever know where you need to get to if you have no clear understanding of where you have come from, and where you are now?

Human nature, and cultural tradition
Our bodies and minds are not of recent origin. They are the direct consequence of millions of years of surviving in Africa and adapting to the dramatic changes this continent has seen in the course of the last five million years. Africa has shaped not only our physical bodies, but the societies within which we live. The way we interact today at a social and cultural level is in many ways the result of organisational skills developed by our hominid ancestors in Africa over millions of years.

*Cradle of Humankind*

Brett Hilton-Barber and Lee R. Berger,
South Africa, 2002
“You can take Man out of the Stone Age, but you can’t take the Stone Age out of Man.”

Nigel Nicholson, Harvard Business Review
July / August 1998
“Learning about Human Learning” —
The emergence of a new Synthesis drawn from several disciplines

1) Philosophy, and later pedagogy
2) Evolutionary Theory
3) Psychology (Behaviourism)
4) Cognitive Science (Metacognition)
5) Neurobiology
6) Evolutionary Psychology
7) Values (philosophy, purpose); Nature via Nurture
Nature via Nurture

Genes are designed to take their cues from nurture. To appreciate what has happened, you will have to abandon cherished notions and open your mind. You will have to enter a world where your genes are not puppet masters pulling the strings of your behaviour, but are puppets at the mercy of your behaviour, a world where instinct is not the opposite of learning, where environmental influences are sometimes less reversible than genetic ones, and where nature is designed for nurture... the human brain is built for nurture.

Matt Ridley
Nature via Nurture 2003
"We have unequivocal evidence that breast-fed children are physically stronger than nonbreast-fed children, that they have greater verbal, quantitative and memory abilities as pre-schoolers, and significantly higher I.Q. scores during their school years. This is due not simply to healthy substances in the milk, as many assume, but also to the early mother-child relationship that breast-feeding implies."

“Why Love Matters: How Affection shapes a baby’s brain”

“Our earliest experiences are not simply laid down as memories or influences; they are translated into precise physiological patterns of response in the brain that then set the neurological rules for how we deal with our feelings and those of other people for the rest of our lives. It’s not nature or nurture, but both. How we are treated as babies and toddlers determines the way in which what we’re born with turns into what we are.”

Sue Gerhardt 2004
Research from the Kellogg Foundation, conducted in the State of Michigan, into the predictors of success at the age of 18

"[This] compared the relative influence that family, community and other factors have on student performance. Amazingly it concluded that factors outside the school are four times more important in determining a student's success on standardized tests than are factors within the school.

The most significant predictor was the quantity and quality of dialogue in the child's home before the age of five."

Quoted at The White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning, April 1997
"As we build networks and patterns of synaptic connections when we are very young, so we build the framework which will 'shape' how we learn as we get older; such 'shaping' will significantly determine what we learn – it will be both an opportunity, and a constraint. The broader and more diverse the experience when very young, the greater are the chances that, later in life, the individual will be able to handle open, ambiguous, uncertain and novel situations."

Adolescence

Adolescence is currently seen as a "problem" in Western Society; that excess of hormones leaves the rapidly maturing child unaware of its new physical strength, and confused as to how to direct it. While modern parents and teachers find adolescence disruptive, earlier cultures directed this energy in ways that developed those skills on which the community was dependent for its ongoing survival. In doing so it also ensured that young people learned, and practiced, what was seen as appropriate social behavior.
Are teenagers Necessary?

Modern society seems to have moved, without skipping a beat, from blaming our parents for the ills of society, to blaming our children.

For most of our history, the labours of young people in their teens was too important to be sacrificed – ‘schooling’ for teenagers remained a minority activity until well into the twentieth century. In fact teenagers can be seen to be an invention of the Machine Age. It was Roosevelt’s solution to the Depression years to take teenagers out of the jobs that could be done by formerly unemployed family men by requiring all early teenagers to attend High School. “But, for very many youngsters, High School, which virtually defines the rise of the teenagers, is hardly an exalted place”.

“The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager”
Thomas Hine, page 1-9
Adolescence and Apprenticeship forms of learning

Thomas Hine writing in 1999 on the rise and fall of the American teenager noted, “the principle reason high schools now enroll nearly all teenagers is that we can’t imagine what else to do with them.” That is a shocking conclusion by a man who spent years studying the issue. Modern society, by being so concerned for the well being of adults tries desperately to ignore the adolescents’ need to explore and do things for themselves, by giving them ever more to do in school. It is as if modern society is trying to outlaw adolescence by over schooling children. That is not education. There is a frightening manmade hole in the desirable experience for adolescence - there are simply not enough opportunities for them to learn from doing things for themselves in a modern society.
Crazy by Design

We have suspected that there is something going on in the brain of the adolescent, apparently involuntarily, that is forcing apart the child/parent relationship. What neurologists are discovering challenges the conventional belief held until only a year or so ago, that brain formation is largely completed by the age of twelve. Adolescence is a period of profound structural change, in fact “the changes taking place in the brain during adolescence are so profound, they may rival early childhood as a critical period of development”, wrote Barbara Strauch in 2003. “The teenage brain, far from being readymade, undergoes a period of surprisingly complex and crucial development”. The adolescent brain, she suggests, “is crazy by design.”
Cultural Speciation

“Men’s natures are alike, it is their habits that carry them far apart”.

Confucius

Habits are our behaviours, first nurtured by our upbringing, subsequently shaped by the values of the society in which we live, they collectively comprise what biologists call nurture. Nature and nurture are the two sides of the coin which makes each of us who we are. Nurture fine-tunes and personalises our basis human natures.

Cultures take many centuries to build up, but they can never be taken for granted, they are totally dependent on the successful transmission of their values, ideas and beliefs from one generation to the next.
The Story of the British

Until very recently historians assumed that, as agriculture improved on the continent, successive waves of immigrants moved into the British Isles, and exterminated the earlier inhabitants. Evidence emerging from genetics shows that this was not the case.

Mitochondria is a unique substance found within DNA that does not recombine as it moves from generation to generation, so retaining an exact history of that person’s evolutionary past – but only on the female side. Consequently, two closely related people will have almost identical mitochondria, whereas people only distantly related will differ by the number of mutations that have accumulated during the generations that have separated them.

The significance of Cheddar Man. The Celts and the Druids.
Imported Culture

The **Babylonians** and the significance of number

The **Greeks**, especially Plato and his assumption that all men could be classified according to gold, silver or iron in their blood.

The **Athenians**, and the concept of school as a *place of pleasurable activity*.

The **Romans**, Roman law and the redefinition of school as a *place of instruction*. 
Oh my God, how I suffered. What torments and humiliations I experienced. I was told that because I was a mere boy I had to obey my teachers in everything. I was sent to school. I did not understand what I was taught, and was beaten for my ignorance. I never found out what use my education was supposed to be.
I learned most not from those who taught me but from those who talked with me.

St. Augustine
6th Century
Roman Education

Roman teachers were rigid grammarians. A textbook from the 4th Century as used in England has survived. It is a catechism of question and answer.

Q. How many are the parts of speech?
   A. Eight

Q. What are they?
   A. Noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition and interjection.

Q. What is a noun?
   A. A part of speech that has a case signifying a body or a thing that is proper or common…
The Jews – a most extraordinary tribe of desert nomads, frequently driven into exile, doing time as slaves, suffering innumerable defeats, they apparently had everything against them. Survivors from a tough place, the Jews were held together by a rigid discipline, and an all-encompassing belief in their being the Chosen People of God. They subscribed to an absolute statement of moral values, including respect for life, justice and social responsibility for the weak and the poor.
Rome, Christianity and Britain. In 324 the Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as the state religion of Rome. In the 6th Century when missionaries came from Rome to convert the English it is recorded that a nobleman addressed a hall full of his countrymen and said *It seems to me that the life of man is like that of a sparrow which flies in at one end of this well-lit and warm hall from the dark outside. The sparrow is here for a few minutes, but then it will fly out again into the dark night. So the life of man here appeareth for a little season, but what follows on or what has gone before that surely we know not? Wherefore if this new learning (Christianity) has brought us any better assurity, me thinks it is worthy to be followed.*
Following the Norman Invasion in the 11th Century monasteries were established across the country. It was in the schools they set up that boys whose parents didn’t need their physical assistance in supporting the family income could learn Latin when as young as five. The pedagogy had not changed since Augustine’s time in Rome, for in 1170 it was noted in Durham that the drone of boys learning Latin and the thwack of corporal punishments were everyday sounds around the precincts of the cathedral while one boy, driven by the fear of the blows of a fierce schoolmaster, threw the keys of the schoolroom into the river. Teachers by the nature of their knowledge base in classical literature quickly assumed that mental agility followed from physical intimidation (“Whacker” Orbillius as noted by Horace)
Henry VIII, the Reformation, Petty Schools, Grammar Schools and Apprenticeship. Inquisitive and energetic the young Shakespeare roamed widely through the fields and forests as a child. Later in his plays he accurately described no fewer than 60 species of birds, and a remarkably 180 plants. His father, a highly successful businessman, was elected mayor of Stratford, but he couldn’t actually write. The young Shakespeare poached and courted by the light of the moon and with a lively imagination came to see in a thunderstorm the makings of a fictitious and terrible tempest and shipwreck. In the 5 or 6 years he spent in school he studied Latin, mastered sentence construction and paraphrasing, and read Aesop’s Fables as well as Ovid, Seneca, and Juvenal. But in Shakespeare’s day schooling simply supplemented a youngster’s personal experience by creating a disciplined structure for mental development, it never suffocated a youngster’s sense of having to work things out for themselves.
Roger Ascham, and *The Scholemaster* published in 1570, the first book ever written in English on the theory of education. Ascham urged the cultivation of what he called “hard wits” rather than the superficial “quick wits” of those youngsters whose memories were good but who couldn’t work things out for themselves. *Because I know that those which be commonly the wisest, the best learned, and best men also, when they be old, were never commonly the quickest of wits when they were young.* Secondly, he urged teachers to be more gentle with their students and warned them against what he called “the butchery of Latin” – go easy on the birch, he said, for children who only learn because they are frightened gain nothing. His third precept was most surprising; *in the attainment of wisdom learning from a book or from a teacher is twenty times as effective as learning from experience.*
I was once in Italy myself, but I thank God that my abode there was but nine days. I saw in that little time, in that one city, more liberty to sin than ever I heard in our noble City of London in nine years. So Ascham concluded piously as he defined what he saw as the indisputable role of the school of the future – school teachers should censor what it is that their students study.
John Milton, poet and Oliver Cromwell’s Minister for Foreign Affairs.

“I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously, all the offices both public and private, of peace and war”.

Compare this with Professor Howard Gardner writing in 2006 called The Five Minds of the Future – the disciplined mind, the synthesising mind, the creating mind, the ethical mind and the respectful mind.
Jan Amos Comenius and the publication of *The Great Didactic* in 1638

Following in the footsteps of nature, Comenius wrote, the process of learning will be easy if it begins before the mine is corrupted; if it proceeds from the general to the particular, from what is easy to what is more difficult; if the pupil is not overburdened by too many subjects, and if the intellect is forced to nothing to which it’s natural bent does not incline it.
The coming of the Industrial Revolution

By the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century England was a land of fertile farms and busy harbours where energy, imagination and innovation had been breed into the people by centuries of pushing the boundaries in an island where to do so always seemed to open further opportunities. Craftsmen and apprentices alike thrived through reciprocal behaviour, empathetic understanding, collaborative skills and a delight in experimentation. England had developed a robust tradition of “making things well”.
Everything that our imaginative ancestors created had to be made by the sweat of their brow. Life was still on a sufficiently human scale for people to know – at a deeply subconscious level – that everything was connected. They had to act intelligently in everything they did.

Writing to his son in 1746 the Earl of Chesterfield said *Do not imagine that the knowledge which I so much recommend to you, is confined to books, pleasing, useful and necessary as that knowledge is, for the knowledge of the world is only to be acquired in the world, and not in a closet. Books alone will never teach it to you; but they will suggest many things to your observation which might otherwise escape you.*
By the early 1700s half the men and a quarter of the women could read and write, yet formal schooling held ever less attraction to their children. The young Humphrey Repton was typical of the times in being removed from Norwich Grammar School at the age of 12 because *My father thought it proper to put a stop to the vile of classical literature, having determined to make me a rich, rather than a learned man.*

Many old grammar schools collapsed never to be heard of again; Winchester College received only 10 pupils in 1750, and the number of students going to Oxford and Cambridge fell by nearly a half. Yet in the late 18th Century where most people were too busy to go to school, innovation knew no limits.
No society in history has ever had to reinvent itself so quickly, or so often as did England as the 18th century began to merge with the 19th. Here was the spontaneous expression of the people’s energy, dependent not simply on the brilliance of an inventor but on the practical skills of carpenters and blacksmiths, goldsmiths, clockmakers and engineers, in hundreds of towns and thousands of villages ready instantly to turn such designs into new machines. England was full of thinkers who knew how to make their innovations work.
The world had never seen growth or change on this scale before. Writing in 1805 Wordsworth said, *Was in truth an hour of universal ferment, mildest men were agitated... the soil of common life was at that time too hot to tread upon*. There was a dark, very dark side of all this innovation well-illustrated by the textile industry. Before Arkwright’s invention of the world’s first mechanical textile factory the industry had consisted of tens of thousands of tiny family businesses each conducted almost exclusively within the home. Children by the age of 9 or 10 knew a lot about the labour that provided their daily bread. They might have been poor, but they had to use their brains effectively on a daily basis if they were to survive. Industrialisation changed every aspect of this equation.
By the end of the 18th century businessmen were becoming phenomenally wealthy in a very short time but the descendents of those countless generations of self-taught farmers, small tradesmen and craftsmen, who made all the innovation actually happen in the first place, saw the craft traditions they had inherited from their forbearers completely disappear within a couple of generations. **Robust individualism was replaced by an unthoughtful, demotivated and unskilled mob of people, ready only for the life of the factory that was being created.** Working men lost not only their dignity, but also their sense of purpose, their informal learning network collapsed, and literacy levels declined dramatically. Drunkenness increased, matrimony decreased, but the birthrate rose remorselessly. **Here was social melt-down on a scale never before experienced, or anticipated, anywhere in the world.**
Laissez-faire. As small market towns suddenly became vast industrial cities within a generation, and the countryside was emptied of its population, social turmoil left the country almost paralyzed. Government at that time was only weakly defined, and looking across the Channel at the turmoil of the French Revolution Englishmen were terrified that should government try to intervene in any way that might only inflame the situation. So government did very little other than limit two 12-hours a day 6 days a week, the time which children below the age of 10 could be employed down a mine or in a factory.
In this harsh world of “make money fast and let the devil take the hind most” the Christian tradition of the country still meant that the Sabbath was sacrosanct; the mills stopped, shops closed, and youthful energy released from the horrors and boredom of the factory began to take its revenge. Multitudes of children, it is reported, prowled the streets “in the shape of wolves and tygers, and honest men feared to leave their homes lest they be plundered by children”.
As the 19th century dawned, well-meaning and well-to-do men and women sought to do what Parliament was still unwilling to undertake; it began to establish in the new sprawling industrial cities voluntarily **Sunday Schools** where children could learn to read and discover enough of Christian teaching so that, when they died – which might well be soon – they would have, so their sponsors fervently believed, a chance of going to heaven. Schools these hardly were, rather they were places of refuge for lost and abandoned children. They were an instant and phenomenal success. With three quarters of a million children attending these schools in the late 1790s rising to nearly 2 million by 1830 and twice that figure by 1850.