

Human Beings - Human Doings

In this time of high stress for parents, babies, children, and teachers it is time to reevaluate what we want for our children and for ourselves from our education system. Part of the solution will be remembering the balance between being and doing, and then working to achieve that.

Education and Cultural Imperatives

Education as we know it is a cultural activity, and different cultures have different takes on what works and what doesn't. For example, the education practices of Japan and Korea could not be more different from those of Sweden and Norway if they had planned it that way. That's because cultural activities are always 'man-made', and sometimes they line up with how people are designed and how they work, and often-times they don't.

What about Biological Imperatives?

Training people to work in the education industry is likewise a cultural activity and is 'man-made'. Sometimes what we are taught - and *how* we are taught - lines up with how we ourselves are designed and learn, and most often it doesn't. Moreover, almost without exception, what we are taught is not in line with how children are designed nor how they learn. It not that the information about age-appropriate biologically-neurologically-compatible teaching and learning isn't available, it is. It's just not taught in most education pre-service training, including Early Childhood pre-service training, and the consequences for the child under three are dire.



Painting: Morgan Weistling

If you are set on measuring, then unseen-reality poses a bit of a problem

I believe that one of the reasons for the mismatch of biological imperatives and cultural imperatives is our compulsion to measure, especially when it rubs up against our bias against the unseen, the 'spiritual'. 'If it can't be seen and measured it doesn't exist' seems to be the underlying mantra. Tell that to someone who is contented, curious, excited, full of wonder, in love, relaxed, or confident. These are all aspects of reality, and I would argue, they are better indicators of a successful programme than anything you can measure. It is nigh impossible to measure something you cannot see like children's happiness; it is too hard to quantify, too hard to evaluate it's worth empirically, and this might be the genesis of murmurings from individuals in the ERO who want a more prescriptive early childhood curriculum. It would make it easier for them to measure.

Being or doing?

Traditionally, teachers have been trained in skills of 'doing' to the exclusion of skills of 'being', the skills of the unseen, skills of the spirit. Our pre-service training drills us in how to 'do' teaching, and included in the teacher's tool kit are the 'doings' of **teaching, extending, planning, scaffolding, questioning...** We have been *modelled* these behaviours - these 'human doings' - and we have been *taught* them. As a result, we often end up believing that these skills are what being a teacher is all about. To add to their legitimacy, there are rules and regulations which enforce these cultural imperatives: you have to do it or you could be mentioned in your workplace report as noncompliant and/or not 'up to scratch'.

The ethic of reciprocity - How would I like it?

But what if these skills and behaviours (as valuable as they can be), block the child in her learning? What if these cultural imperatives are a poor match for the biological imperatives of the child? If we were to put ourselves into the learner's shoes and ask ourselves, "How would I like it?" we would get a better idea about what is appropriate, and when.

Let me do it

If you or I were learning something that was new to us, we'd want to take our time. We'd want time to ponder, to figure it out - then try it out. If it didn't work the first time we would try again. We'd try to figure out another way and then try *that* out. It depends on how much stickability we had developed as learners how long you or I would keep this 'figure-it-out-try-it-out' pattern going, but most of us keep going until we get it. Or until we are stymied. If we achieve it, there is such a sense of joy and wellbeing. If we are stymied then - and only then - we ask for help. And we only want as much help as we ask for, we don't want the 'teacher' to take over and do it for us. This pattern of **discovery** is the age old human pattern that is also known as learning. It's a species thing, it's good for all ages of *homo sapiens sapiens*. We are born curious, and if we get a fair go, we want to try things out and discover how they work, **in real time, in real life**, not in assignments.

I need to discover it on my own

It is crucial that the child discover as much as possible on his own. If we assist him in accomplishing every task, we deprive him of the single most important aspect of development.

A child who achieves things through independent experimentation acquires an entirely different kind of knowledge than does a child who has ready made solutions offered to him.

Dr Emmi Pikler • Painting by Adriana Mufarrege



Too often what is deemed **scaffolding, open ended questioning, extending** and **teaching** does not facilitate the independent experimentation Emmi Pikler is talking about. Too often it is adult intrusion and leads children to learn the practice of "brain borrowing". Brain borrowing is when the child takes all the cues and scaffolding to achieve something they wouldn't have achieved independently, at least not at that time in that way. For example -

"What would happen if you turned it around? Would it fit then? Keep going.

That's the way, that way looks like it could work. Try that."

From teacher to educator

This is an extreme example, but my guess is that we have all done it sometime during our journey towards being and educator rather than a teacher. That journey asks us to become skilled in Human Being, so that we know *when* to apply the human doings, and *how* to apply them in ways that allow the child the satisfaction of making *her own* knowledge.

Notes for **Dance with me in the Heart • Level Two** • Pennie Brownlee • 2013

Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.

Albert Einstein