

JUST IMAGINE!

Living the Learning

In some Japanese kindergartens and schools, children prepare, cook and clean up their lunches. Their meals are delicious and healthy. They learn to work as a team and create community around eating in an intentional way. This is a clear difference from the mass-produced 'fast food' idea of education - where children's food is packaged and served to them and they eat it as passive recipients.

This model of experiential learning, that integrates meaningful life-skills alongside other knowledge, could be expanded to all aspects of the education system.

It has been well-documented that Japanese children do not have eating disorders like children in other nations.

Learner Passivity to Activity

Instead of the learner being a passive recipient of knowledge, in this type of establishment, the learner is always an active participant. Instead of watching films, learners create them. All it takes is a phone. Instead of looking at pictures in books, learners take photographs. Instead of reading newspaper articles, students write newspaper articles, ads, opinions, editorials. Instead of studying pollution, children study the companies, technologies, environmentalists who are causing it, cleaning it up, innovating, protesting.

What our brains do a lot of, our brains gets good at, but if our brains are passive, they are not *doing* anything that they can get good at.

The most passive learning experiences occur in higher education

How is it possible that in training colleges and universities 'education' means herding anywhere from 200 to 1000 brains into a big room, positioning a speaker at the front of the room, one who is rarely trained in how to present or teach effectively, and he or she gives 'lectures.'

Students' learning is then measured by how much they absorb in this format. It is a ludicrous situation.

Neuroscientific research is clear that learning is actually acquired by repeated action which myelinates a neural network turning it from a little trail into a super highway where knowledge moves at the speed of light.

Sitting in a chair, with oxygenated blood pooling in the student's feet, does not create the optimum conditions for learning. If anyone wanted to construct a space most antithetical to the brain, he or she would build a 'school'.

A New University?

A university is a microcosm of the working world with the exception that it is a repository of knowledge, as well as supposedly being on the cutting-edge of invention and innovation.

Considering that the adolescent brain is peaking in terms of creativity, intellectual risk-taking and capacity to learn at unprecedented rates, what if university students were assigned to 'real-life' mentors?. What if students were not just expected to listen, but could speak and interact.

Learners could do a first year rotation where for a week at a time, they could examine how an intellectual corporation operates - and they could contribute to that operation.

Assignments could be chosen from the rotations that most engage them and learners could be given actual problems for which they create solutions.

Learners could begin to specialize in a second year and choose to further examine leadership, finance, negotiation, scientific research, literary studies, innovation, entrepreneurship, or whatever else that caught their interest.

What if for a week or so, learners mentored their teachers? What if they helped integrate technology into existing systems, streamlined operations from a user perspective, offered insights into blocks to communication or productivity? What if lectures were replaced with research teams where groups of students who worked alongside experienced professionals and pooled information, brainstormed ideas, problem-solved when facing impasses, and learned by *doing*?

What would happen if learners were given more input in determining the content and delivery of their education?

It is no longer seen as just or healthy to force a child to eat food that repulses them. We are calmed by the knowledge that a child may develop a taste for such food later on and can always try then. However, throughout higher education, we still force children to take a broad range of courses, many that they hate.

As children advance through the education system, they should be empowered to make more choices as to what engages their interest, draws their attention, ignites their desire to work.

Content that does not engage them, does not correspond with individual learning styles, holds them back from time better spent on their interests should be replaced. When learners want to circle back and learn math or biology or a language later, it should be possible and taught in intensive catch-up courses - true 'life-long learning'

Penalizing mistakes halts learning

Neuroscientists know that brains learn by making errors, but we now have an 'education' system that penalises errors. We impress on learners at early ages and right through to higher education that if they make a mistake, they will suffer for it.

This is the greatest obstacle to learning, creativity, problem-solving, innovation and invention. Throw out the memory tests and focus on practice, mistake-making, risk-taking, until improved levels of mastery regularly occurs.

Outdated forms of expression need updating

Michel de Montaigne created the idea of the *essai* or essay in 16th century France; yet it is still the way learners are required to express their knowledge.

Imagine an establishment that used role-playing, mediation, videos, Instagram albums, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, articles, op-eds, Wikipedia entries, dance, sermons, speeches, athletics, theatre, courtroom mock-trials and other applications to express learning and knowledge.

Why couldn't students produce short-films? Why don't students deliver radio content? Why don't students distribute interesting, print-based community items?

Why are these experiences placed outside of the curriculum and merge into fringe activities, while we prioritise rote learning and memory tests? With the advance of technology, memory should no longer be the measuring stick of learning.