The Responsibility of Education

A Resource to Inspire Autonomous,
Lifelong Learning and Teaching

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www.TheRoE.org
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Welcome. This is a website to help you think about education better, and, ultimately, to help you make learning and teaching an essential part of your life.

The site includes a complete course of study. You can work through it alone, but I recommend inviting a friend, parent, spouse, or tutor. Much of the course material is meant for discussion, and there's really no substitute for the power of dialogue.

It's important that your education receive individual attention, both your own and that of a caring guide—someone to investigate your interests and talents with you, someone to model autonomous learning and teaching, someone to help you design a vision and purpose for your continuing education. I work as such a tutor, and you can contact me here to arrange a meeting. But anyone can use this site to guide a willing student, or themselves, through the course.

Everyone should be encouraged to define and manage an education that feels authentic and vital, one that fosters meaningful work and fulfillment. Everyone should be invited to discuss the important questions that shape the way we learn and teach, the way we raise young people, and the way we build an educative society. The responsibility of education belongs to everyone. It is my sincerest aim to empower this responsibility, for I believe it is at the heart of a life well-lived, and one of the best hopes for humanity's future.

Let's get started.

Course Hub

Course Material

- Syllabus 2
- Choosing the Course (pt. 1) 6
- Choosing the Course (pt. 2) 9
- Some Notes 12

Assignments

- Initial Questions for Students and Parents 14
- Creating a Knowledge Management System 15
- Defining Education for Yourself 19
- Keeping Track of Important Ideas 20
- Exploring Topics for Self-Directed Study 22
- Strategies for Cultivating Vocation 25
- Tools to Improve Learning 36
- Tools to Create Effective Habits 42
- Developing a Growth Mindset 49
- Guidelines for General Health 60
- Practicing Mindfulness 67
- Optimizing Your Free Time 73

Essays

- What is the responsibility of education? 84
- Education Without Romance 91
- Results vs. Systems 102

Discussion Material

- Introductory Notes 109

1. Why should we take more responsibility for our education? 112

2. Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention? . . . 119
3. What is education for? What should the goals of education be? . . . 128
4. Why is lifelong learning important? . . . 140
5. Why might it be difficult to assume the responsibility of education? . . . 147
6. How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn? . . . 154
7. What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others? . . . 166
8. How should we think about and spend our leisure? . . . 177
9. What constitutes mental health? How should we be educated to this end? . . . 189
10. What constitutes a successful adolescence? . . . 198
11. Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility? . . . 208
12. How can young people be exposed to challenge in ways that foster growth? . . . 223
13. What is a "gap year"? How can we incorporate maturing activities into education? . . . 230
14. How can parents improve their influence on their children? . . . 239
15. How can we foster self-directed learning in others? . . . 257
16. Do we really value education? Why do we value it? . . . 264
17. What do we teach via our character and the environments we create? . . . 276
18. Why might young people dislike school? . . . 286
19. Why might teachers dislike school? . . . 296
20. What are the effects of coercion in education? . . . 308
21. What is the nature of authority? How is it gained or lost? . . . 323
22. Why is cultivating gratitude in education important? . . . 331
23. How or why should we incorporate the spiritual, sacred, or transcendent in education? . . . 337
24. Why is cultivating individuality in education important? . . . 347
25. What is "reality of encounter" and why is it important in education? . . . 353

26. How do adult expectations influence young people? 361
27. Why is trust and faith in young people important in education? 369
28. What is the power of words? Why should we learn to write, speak, and read well? 377
29. How does our experience of school resources differ from those outside of school? 387
30. How does "global competition" effect education? 394
31. Why is there an imbalance between material progress and psychological progress? 402
32. What is "signaling" and why is it an important concept in education? 408
33. How does our culture view college and vocational choices? How does this effect our systems of education? 414
34. What is the proper function of the university? 427
35. What is the reality of the university? 438
36. How are young people prepared for the world of work? 450
37. How can praise for being smart affect students? 461

About 467

Contact 469

Course Material



Syllabus

This course addresses several problems with the way many of us think about and experience education. The following are a few we would work together to solve:

– Many young people pursue academic goals without regard for their interests or talents. They lack a sense of personal direction that would give meaning, durability, and motivation to their academic work.

– As young people much of our learning is passive, serving goals we've accepted reluctantly (if at all). We do what we must to get by, and long for freedom from education (as we know it). Lacking a personal idea of what our education ought to be, we're "finished" with it too soon, leaving important needs for knowledge and experience unmet.

– As we mature, few of us come to see our education—our growth and development—as something for which we are personally responsible. We're content to delegate responsibility for education, as individuals and as a society, to a small group of professionals; therefore most of us don't address the important questions that inform the many ways we learn from and teach one another.

– Few of us have a plan, and purpose, for our continuing education. As adolescents we aren't well prepared to take charge of our learning, or assume the authority (and humanity) of a teacher.

The following principles will guide our efforts as we address these problems:

1. Defining and administering our education is one of the most formative and rewarding processes of our lives. It's also one of the most important, all-encompassing responsibilities of adulthood.

2. The lifelong, self-sufficient learner—one who doesn't need to be constantly overseen or bribed (and one who isn't repulsed by learning because of these experiences)—is the ideal. Short-term methods shouldn't undermine this long-term goal.

3. As students we should strive to be active and independent. We all have compelling needs and desires to learn, but they can't give meaning to our lives if we don't acknowledge and

act on them. Most of the important knowledge we need in life must be sought personally. Our sense of purpose and identity is often found in self-directed explorations.

4. Mature learning and teaching benefit from critical thought about educational issues. We should be exposed to important thinkers who can inform our educational perspectives and practices. Discussing these fundamental issues will help us consider our personal obligation to education, develop our powers of critical thought, and become more wise, exemplary teachers and learners.

5. The responsibility of education belongs to everyone. We all have great potential that can be realized only through continual growth and learning. We all have an inescapable influence on our environment and the growth of others. Facilitating human flourishing shouldn't be the responsibility of only a few professions and institutions. We all have a duty to cultivate ourselves and promote the healthy development of others.

6. It's important that our educational goals are our own, that they provide us with a sense of authentic accomplishment and genuine self-worth. Achieving these goals, and making a lasting place for education in our lives, is a matter of developing the necessary habits, of shaping our environment, mindsets, and identities as learners.

7. There is great potential for joy, pride, solidarity, and self-discovery in learning for ourselves. We miss out on much of the beauty of life if we neglect our intellectual development.

This course has two (concurrent) parts. In the first, we'll discuss the important questions that inform the way we learn and teach. For each question, there is a document (5 pages, on average) offering the answers of notable thinkers. This material is meant to be read and discussed the following week. It's recommended that the initial sessions address the following topics:

1. Why should we take more responsibility for our education?

2. Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?

3. What is education for? What should the goals of education be?

For later sessions, the student and tutor will choose from the list of additional Discussion Material, or the student may propose his or her own topics.

In the second part of the course we'll explore subjects for self-directed study based on the student's interests, talents, and educational goals (informed by discussion topic #3 above). The aim here is to cultivate authentic, purposeful work and leisure, as well as to construct a vision for the student's continuing education. This includes assignments for developing the resources and habits that will help the student make learning a way of life.

As part of the course, students are encouraged to:

... keep a journal to: collect thoughts as we discuss educational issues, keep track of their goals and habits, and organize their curriculum as it develops.

... write about the ideas we cover (and other topics that matter to them), and to work with the tutor to improve their writing.

... create a knowledge management system (digital and analog) to document and organize their learning—a personal database to collect and develop important ideas.

... outline a personal educational curriculum, based on questions like: What should the goals of my education be? What intellectual capabilities do I want for myself? What qualities should I develop as a citizen? etc.

... consider topics for in-depth study, based on questions like: What interests me? What are my authentic talents? What problems are most worthy of my attention? What kind of creative, ambitious, long-term projects appeal to me? etc.

... use their free time more deliberately. To seek activities (educational or otherwise) that further their goals, interests, and general well-being. To keep lists of worthwhile pursuits, books and other resources, and to chip away at these lists.

... develop a practice of mindfulness. To cultivate awareness, self-control, and peace of mind.

... take care of their physical well-being, as it is essential to their intellectual development. To practice healthy habits of sleep, diet, exercise, and relaxation.

... regularly discuss their work in this course with their parents, involve them as much as possible, and work with them to build a supportive intellectual environment at home.

... interact with other students in the tutoring program who are exploring similar topics, create their own learning circles, and find teachers/mentors who can further their goals.

As part of the course, parents are encouraged to:

... complete the initial questionnaire to improve the tutor's effectiveness.

... be as involved in the student's experience of the course as possible. Some options are: following the reading their son/daughter does; discussing the reading, as well as the student's interests and thoughts on education; participating in lessons the tutor has designed for parents; pursuing their own education-based reading list or self-directed curriculum.

... help the student in their independent studies if the student is willing (but not to attempt to "motivate" the student in ways that undermine their autonomy).

... interact with other parents in the tutoring program who are exploring similar topics.

... contact the tutor to stay informed of the student's progress and the work being done. (It is also one of the responsibilities of students to "debrief" parents after tutoring sessions, and regularly keep parents informed.)

The following are some important tenets of the course:

1. All work to be done will be mutually agreed upon. It's important that students develop the habit of *working for themselves*, and considering how their efforts contribute to goals they have chosen. To this end, the tutor will explain the purpose of the work he proposes, and students are encouraged to ask, "Why?" whenever they think such justification is lacking.

2. If students decide they have no use for the course, they shouldn't be forced into it. Students should come to appreciate their personal needs and desires for learning, without coercion. That being said, I highly recommend that reluctant students attend the first three sessions which address the significance and necessity of self-directed learning.

Choosing the Course (pt. 1)

Dear Student,

This course is called The Responsibility of Education. What education means to you is something we'll discuss throughout, but I think, at the most basic level, education means *growth*. The course is about taking responsibility for your growth and your influence on the growth of others.

When you're a child, it's fitting that adults, who know better than you, direct your growth. When you enter adolescence you should start asking yourself (with the support of adults): How do I want to grow? What directions of growth are most authentic to me? What do I want to be able to do, say, think, and create? What problems do I want to solve? How do I want to make the world better?

Answering these questions for yourself gives you personal, meaningful learning goals. And pursuing these goals fundamentally changes the way you learn.

This learning is often deeper and more lasting. It exposes you to the more attractive, intrinsic rewards of learning, making you more likely to learn throughout your life. The voluntary nature of this learning gives expression to an emerging sense of self that demands clarity, agency, and self-determined purpose. The more you work toward these goals, the more competent and substantial that self becomes.

As an adult, no one is going to make sure you keep growing. And no one is going to make sure your influence on the growth of others is positive. If you want to teach others well and shape environments that promote human well-being, you must claim a certain degree of responsibility for yourself: your character, your values, your speech, etc. Learning to appreciate and improve your inevitable impact on the world around you is one of the most important tasks you can take on.

Few decisions are more significant than choosing to honor your growth and your influence on the growth of others. Doing so will change the way you value your time, the way you relate to others and the larger world. If you want it to this course can be a milestone in your life. A point in time when you choose to expect more from yourself, when you raise your standards of maturity and intellectual ability. You can choose to make the space of these

tutoring sessions special—somewhere you can be a different kind of student, where you can aspire to and accomplish more than you thought you could.

This course would ask a lot of you—not in terms of the quantity of work involved (that will be up to you), but in terms of the quality of your involvement. The course represents the uncommon expectations I have for you, and my faith in your ability to meet them. But more important than what others would ask of you, is what you will ask of yourself: Given the nature of the task before you—of caring for and cultivating the person that is you, who has an unavoidable impact on the world, and the potential to do great good—what kind of person will you be? What will you aim for? How will your aims effect others?

How will you choose to grow? And for what purposes?

These are the central questions we'll address together. It's my aim to help you appreciate and fulfill your responsibility to learn and teach to the best of your ability. I want to help you develop the skills, insight, and motivation to choose the best education for yourself (and eventually those under your care) and to pursue it continually.

Naturally, questions concerning your growth are of interest to your parents. An essential part of this course is their inclusion, and both of your combined efforts to develop relationships and a home environment that further your learning goals (which you've discussed together). It will benefit you greatly to involve your parents in your autonomous education. They can be an invaluable source of caring guidance, wisdom, and knowledge of you.

Though I'll take measures to inform your parents of our work together, I want you to be the main conduit through which this information is shared. One of the goals of this course (one that I encourage you to adopt personally) is to support the intellectual life of your family—to prompt meaningful, enlightening conversation that brings you together. And, after all, if what you're studying isn't something you're eager to talk about, then you're probably studying the wrong thing.

There are no grades or scores that will represent (or oversimplify) the effectiveness of this course. To evaluate it, you and your parents must discuss the goals you've chosen and whether enough progress is being made toward them. Perhaps most importantly, you must evaluate your own efforts. Are you actively participating, or are you expecting change to come from outside? This course (and all mature education, for that matter) isn't like a

restaurant where you pay for food and simply consume it (willingly or not). It's more like a gym membership with a personal trainer, where achieving your goals requires your consistent, voluntary effort. In such a gym, you pay for access to certain resources; how much value you get from them is (for the most part) up to you.

The first step is making the choice to take the course for reasons that are your own (not because someone else wants you to). No one is forcing you to take it; there are no artificial consequences if you don't. But think of the *natural* consequences of a life without educational responsibility—without continual learning and considerate teaching. And think of the blessings of a life *with* this responsibility—the benefits to yourself and all those you would affect.

Choosing this course starts with declaring a personal value—"I value my development as a person, and I sense (at least in an initial way) my need to be responsible for it. I value the effect my learning and teaching has on the world around me, and I want to improve it."

Among the educational goals you may choose, this one is foundational: I want to grow in meaningful, authentic, exemplary ways that improve my life and the lives of others.

If this purpose resonates with you—if you're willing to claim and uphold this value—then I think you have much to gain from this course, and the world has much to gain from your embrace of the responsibility of education.

Choosing the Course (pt. 2)

Dear Student,

It's strange that school is the chief occupation of young people, yet they aren't included in much discussion about education. We endorse critical thinking and self-reflection, but neglect this valuable opportunity for it.

Maybe young people aren't ready to consider the issues of education. Maybe they aren't ready to understand their best interests, or do for themselves what others try to do for them. But this perspective (held long after it has merit) has left many young people dependent and directionless, unprepared to manage their education on their own. It's not enough to plan an educational path for young people and hold them to it; this is a good start, but eventually they should ask: Who am I? What is the right path for me? And they shouldn't have to address these questions alone, or discover that they're important by chance.

Young people (adolescents in particular) are in need of self-determination, authenticity, competence, and purpose. I believe they're not only hungry for these things but capable of taking the responsibility to acquire them—a belief shared by a respected tradition of brilliant minds. It certainly is difficult to strive for these values, and they may seem unlikely considering how young people often behave. But I also believe that young people want to demand more of themselves, and will do so, given meaningful opportunity, capable support, and expectations that respect their true potential.

The purpose of this course is to help you further *your* educational goals (and help you choose good ones). The material we would study isn't arbitrary or irrelevant; I believe it's essential to a fulfilled life. No one will force you to be here or do work you don't find valuable. The traditional motivators you're used to won't be present here, just as they aren't present for most of adulthood. In the absence of these forces, what will become of your education? Will you learn and improve your mind when no one is making you? Will you be responsible for your growth when no one else is?

This is a challenge we all face, one that has significant bearing on the quality of our lives and the world at large. That being said, one of my goals is to help you rise to this challenge. I hope to help you find inspiring reasons to educate yourself throughout your life, for your own sake and for the world you will help shape.

This course is an opportunity for you to consider your best interests and make an autonomous choice on your own behalf. To prove wrong those who would say you're too immature to know what's good for you. It's an opportunity to work for yourself and to earn genuine self-esteem. To enter into a culture of more noble values, to give yourself permission to read, write, speak, and listen as skillfully as you can. To find joy in discovering knowledge for yourself, to feel pride in the use of your mind, and to come to value this kind of satisfaction above so many lesser pleasures. To have someone interested in your education as a whole, and across time. To appreciate the good fortune to have a liberating education—to be able to shape your learning so that you can flourish as a free, responsible human being. To find those voices from the past and present that speak to you most directly, to find solace in their gifts, and to lovingly cultivate your own.

This course is an opportunity for me as well, to fulfill my responsibilities as a teacher. To offer what I've found to be some of the most essential lessons and useful ideas. To continue my own education, and conduct the inquiry that's central to my ongoing learning: What are the best ways to help young people (and adults alike) assume the responsibilities of education?

One of the premises of this course is that you are more capable of assuming these responsibilities than you think (and often more than your culture has enabled you to be). But building this competence takes practice, and some resolve. There are understandable reasons why you might show reluctance toward this course and the effort it would ask, and there are similar reasons why a culture might not enable the best in you. These reasons are the subject of discussions we would undertake, if you wish (topics such as "Why might it be difficult to assume the responsibilities of education?", among others). Confronting the obstacles that inhibit learning and teaching is vital, to the improvement of our institutions and our personal lives.

I understand that you may be weary of teachers, and doubt the usefulness of their lessons. But I'm not a teacher like many of those you've known. There's no bureaucracy controlling my methods, no standardized test determining my curriculum. There's no external force compelling you to be here; for this I rely on the power of the material itself and your ability to tap into that power. I teach what I love, what has enlightened me, and what I believe will benefit you most. I require that you be here voluntarily because it would be an injustice to force it on you, to rob you of the opportunities for autonomy mentioned above, to devalue the material because of resentment or distracting incentives.

I understand that other obligations and desires may leave you little time and energy to work for yourself. It is, and will always be, difficult to prioritize the responsibility of education above other things. But, I don't believe it is an exaggeration to say, your very life is at stake. No one is going to make sure you know many of the most important things you should know. No one is going to deliver to you the knowledge that will enable you to comprehend your intricate mind, develop and apply your unique powers, raise a healthy family, build a prosperous society, or reveal the deepest wonder and complexity of life. There are plenty of wise teachers to inform these pursuits, but it falls to you to seek them. This searching, this responsibility, however challenging, is one of the most rewarding and meaningful human endeavors. For as you learn freely, under your own direction, you give shape and substance to your self, and you give rise to a culture that is more likely to enable the best in everyone.

I look forward to beginning this work with you.

Sincerely,
– Thomas Cook

Some Notes

This course in intended for anyone who finds it attractive.

As it deals with assuming personal responsibility for education, it's unlikely to appeal to students who are too young to appreciate the need to: articulate authentic goals for their learning, or consider their influence on others and assume some responsible for it. Broadly speaking, this level of maturity begins in adolescence. (Keep in mind that several of the Discussion Topics deal with the readiness of students to handle responsibility, and whether we are offering it when we should.)

If you're an adult considering this course for a young person, you should review all the course documents and decide whether they are fit for it. To introduce the course to a student, send them a link to the homepage, which should direct them to read through the Course Material. At this point the best test of whether a student will benefit from the course is whether they a) read these documents, and b) choose to give the course a chance.

By all means, be as persuasive as you can in your advocacy (while respecting the student's autonomy). Though I've done my best to present the value of the course in these introductory pages, your own sincere words are likely to be significant. Whether or not a young person is ready to take the course, they can still benefit from it through you, as you work with the material and use its ideas in the ways you teach and learn.

Assignments



Initial Questions for Students and Parents

These questions are meant to provide a tutor with some relevant information about students and parents, and to raise for discussion the ideas covered in the Course Material. Even if you're working through the course without a partner, I recommend considering these questions on your own.

Students:
– Having read the Course Material, do you have any questions about them? What are your thoughts on the course so far?
– What kind of student are you? What are your strengths, weaknesses, study habits, likes, dislikes, etc.?
– How do you feel about school?
– What are your extracurricular activities? How do you spend your free time?
– How confident are you in your ability to direct your education responsibly? Why?
– What questions do you have for me?

Parents:
– Having read the Course Material, do you have any questions about them? How do you feel about the course, generally?
– How involved would you like to be in the course? (For example: following the reading your son or daughter does; discussing the reading with them, as well as their interests and thoughts on education; participating in lessons the tutor has designed for parents; pursuing your own education-based reading list or independent study curriculum.)
– What kind of student is your son or daughter?
– How confident are you in their ability to direct their education responsibly? Why?
– What else do you think I should know (regarding you, your son or daughter, their education, etc.)?
– What questions do you have for me?

Creating a Knowledge Management System

Modern technology can easily overwhelm you with information,[1] but it also provides helpful tools for consuming that information effectively. Personal Knowledge Management (PKM) apps help you capture, organize, and create valuable ideas.[2] The database you develop can act as a "second brain," improving how you work, digest media, and, ultimately, how you make sense of yourself and the world.

Here are some possible uses for your PKM system:
– Saving important passages from books, podcasts, videos, conversations, etc.
– Keeping track of tasks, goals, or any kind of routine.
– Managing large projects, breaking them down into parts, and organizing research.
– All things journaling/writing: reflecting on your day, planning for tomorrow, expressing gratitude, giving your thoughts the attention they deserve.
– Maintaining lists of books and other media you want to consume.
– Reviewing and synthesizing your notes regularly.

Here are a few videos about the theory and management of a PKM system:
Ali Abdaal – The Second Brain: A Life-Changing Productivity System
Ali Abdaal – How to Organise your Life: Building a Second Brain

It's easy to spend too much time researching PKM apps. No app will be "perfect"; each has trade-offs. Some people use a combination of software to suit their particular needs. You can always switch apps later if you're unsatisfied.

Remember that a PKM app is a tool you should enjoy using to help you think and create better. Don't just collect the thoughts of others without expressing your own. Don't get bogged down in features you don't need or overwhelmed by the depth of the app. Take it slowly and enjoy the learning process.

From my own research, I recommend either Obsidian or Notion.

Both have a free version that can do just about anything you'll want to do. Both are easy to get into yet have considerable depth, enabling greater efficiency and functionality. Both have great tutorials and online communities.

Here are some of the major differences:

Obsidian

Pros:

– Your files are saved locally, which allows offline access, improves privacy, and makes searching within the app fast.
– It has a simple, minimalist aesthetic.
– Features can be added easily by downloading free plugins in-app.
– The app loads fast and doesn't require sign-up or login.
– Designed more for knowledge management, linking notes to maximize creative connections.

Cons:

– Syncing local files to mobile or other devices requires using either the paid Obsidian Sync add-on or third-party apps.

Notion

Pros:

– Your files are saved in the cloud, which makes syncing across devices easier.
– It has a more customizable aesthetic, with emojis, color schemes, and header images.
– Includes more standard features that don't require manual download.
– Designed more for all-inclusive life and work management. Better for managing shared projects with a team.

Cons:

– No offline access (as files are saved in the cloud).
– It takes longer to load and search within the app.

If the pros and cons haven't swayed you one way or the other, or you simply don't want to bother with a lengthy comparison, I would just choose Obsidian and get started with it.

(Note that these apps are updated constantly and the following videos may differ slightly from the current software version. However, the following (and many other) YouTube channels are usually good about making updated content for the latest version.)

The following intro tutorials will help you get a feel for working in the apps:
Linking Your Thinking – Obsidian for Beginners: Start HERE
Teacher's Tech – Getting Started with Notion – Beginners Tutorial

Once you've chosen an app, here are some tutorials to get you going:

For Obsidian:
Linking Your Thinking – Obsidian for Beginners Playlist
A Better Computer – Getting Started with Obsidian
Danny Hatcher – Obsidian for beginners: Building a second brain from scratch
Nicole van der Hoeven – How to get started with Obsidian in 2022 – from scratch!
FromSergio – Mastering Obsidian Playlist

For Notion:
Thomas Frank Explains – Notion Fundamentals Playlist
Better Creating – Get Organised In Notion Fast! My Quick-Start Guide 2025

Get yourself a journal, also.

Though digital tools have their advantages, your knowledge management system should allow you to unplug. Besides the freedom a physical notebook affords, writing on actual paper has unique benefits for learning and planning. There's also a charm to putting pen to paper, especially when you have tools you enjoy (and pleasant handwriting).

Building a relationship with these tools can help you make a lasting place for learning in your life. Whether you're mastering your customized knowledge management software, or packing your well-worn journal for a trip into nature, these resources can make learning more personal and meaningful.

Footnotes

[1] The brain's capacity is not unlimited. The passageway from perception to understanding is narrow. It takes patience and concentration to evaluate new information—to gauge its accuracy, to weigh its relevance and worth, to put it into context—and the Internet, by design, subverts patience and concentration. [Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, 2010, W. W. Norton & Co., 2020, pp. ix-x]

> Information is the food of the mind. More information isn't always good for you. It's actually good to, from time to time, take time for information fasts, when we don't put anything more in, we just digest and detoxify. And similarly, we should watch the quality of the information we feed our mind. If we feed our mind with all this junk information full of greed and hate and fear, we will have sick minds. [Yuval Noah Harari, "How to safeguard your mind in the age of junk information," *YouTube*, uploaded by Big Think, 11 Aug. 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1OvbwY6GPM]

[2]

> [I]ntelligence [is] not simply "in the head" but [is] "distributed" in the person's world ... Intelligence, in a word, reflects a micro-culture of praxis: the reference books one uses, the notes one habitually takes, the computer programs and databases one relies upon, and perhaps most important of all, the network of friends, colleagues, or mentors on whom one leans for feedback, help, advice, even just for company. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, p. 132]

Defining Education for Yourself

Before going on to read the answers of others, ask yourself: "What is education for? What should the goals of education be?" Write down your ideas and reflect on them. Where did your answers come from? Have you ever discussed these questions with anyone? How, and from where, have you absorbed answers implicitly?

Then read the following discussion material "What is education for?" Use it to craft a personal definition of education.

Think along these lines:
"Education is ... "
"A successful education should enable me to ... "
"The goals/objectives/purposes of my education should be ... "

This definition will be a valuable tool—a guiding force as you consider what you ought to learn and why. It should outline the scope of your task as a well-rounded, lifelong learner.

Discuss this definition with your tutor, together with the material from "What is education for?" Consider the particular subjects, habits, and mindsets that will satisfy the educational objectives outlined in your definition.

What aspects of your curriculum are, or should be, universal? What do you think everyone ought to learn? Is there one "best" way to achieve the goals of education, or can different means achieve the same ends? What aspects ought to be unique to each individual?

Always be open to ways to improve or adapt this definition as your education evolves.

In particular, as you work through each part of this course, be open to any ideas that can inform the definition of what your education ought to accomplish.

Keeping Track of Important Ideas

Record the important ideas you come across, whether they're original or from other sources. Attribute significance to the ideas you find profound.

Appreciate when you feel the spark of interest, curiosity, or awe. Don't discount these experiences. Take note of them, follow up on them, allow them to inspire you to action.

Always be on the look-out for wise, relevant, meaningful thoughts and voices.

Collect these thoughts in your Knowledge Management System, where you can easily call on them when needed. You may want to arrange them by topic: "On Happiness," "On Work," etc. And/or in different tiers of importance: wisdom that deserves daily remembrance, weekly, monthly.

> Words of wisdom, the meaning of life ... all of these may wash over us every day, but they can do little for us unless we savor them, engage with them, question them, improve them, and connect them to our lives. ...
>
> We might already have encountered the Greatest Idea, the insight that would have transformed us had we ... taken it to heart ... [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. xiii, ix]

> Ritual can be defined as the structured repetition of important concepts, made resonant through the help of formal pageantry and ceremony. Ritual takes thoughts that are known but unattended and renders them active and vivid once more in our distracted minds. Unlike standard modern education, ritual doesn't aim to teach us anything new; it wants to lend compelling form to what we believe we already know. It wants to turn our theoretical allegiances into habits. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, p. 14]

> There are signals from inside, there are voices that yell out, "By gosh this is good, don't ever doubt it!" This is a path, one of the ways that we try to teach self-actualization and the discovery of the self. The discovery of identity comes via the impulse voices, via the ability to listen to your own guts, and to their reactions and to what is going on inside of you. [Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 1971, Penguin, 1993,

> p. 171, https://www.slideshare.net/imbangjtrenggana/abraham-h-maslow-the-farther-reaches-of-human-nature-penguin-nonclassics-1993]

> A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Washington Square Press, 1965, p. 240]

> Persons of low self-esteem tend to discount the productions of their mind. It is not that they never get worthwhile ideas. But they do not value them, do not treat them as potentially important, often do not even remember them very long—*rarely follow through with them*. In effect, their attitude is, "If the idea is mine, how good can it be?" [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, p. 47]

> Your professors will give you some fine books to read, and they'll probably help you understand them. What they won't do, for reasons that perplex me, is to ask you if the books contain truths you could live your lives by. When you read Plato, you'll probably learn about his metaphysics and his politics and his way of conceiving the soul. But no one will ask you if his ideas are good enough to believe in. ... No one, in short, will ask you to use Plato to help you change your life. ...
>
> That will be up to you. ...
>
> And you will have to be tough if the professor mocks you for uttering a sincere question instead of keeping matters easy for all concerned by staying detached and analytical. (Detached analysis has a place—but, in the end, you've got to speak from the heart and pose the question of truth.) [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 64-65]

Exploring Topics for Self-Directed Study

> It's astonishing to us how many kids have never asked themselves what it is they want, or have never had someone ask it of them. They're too busy either trying to please others, or rebelling against others' control. But they need to think for themselves about themselves. They need to consider their special talents and life purpose. They should ask, "What do I want? What do I love to do?" You can help them ask these questions, even if you can't supply the answers. Hard as it may be to accept this, it's your child's responsibility to find interests and motivation in life. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 126]

– List 5 things you're interested in that you would enjoy studying or working on (e.g. inspiring people, events, fields of knowledge, current issues, etc.).
– List 5 skills or areas of expertise you would want to have.
– List 5 things you're good at, anything from subjects in school to general character strengths.
– List 5 qualities about yourself that you would like to improve.
– List 5 challenges, difficulties, or problems you currently face.

It's okay if you can't come up with five topics per category; make each one meaningful to you.

Note that these aren't questions you answer once and for all. When choosing a direction for your studies, there's no such thing as a perfect or final choice, you can always change (or add) directions, and doing so is never a bad thing as long as you're learning. Addressing these questions should be a regular part of your lifelong education. Always be open to new interests and urgent topics that deserve your attention.

If you're an adult guiding a young person through this exercise, you can make your own lists to compare and discuss:

– With your understanding of this particular young person, what things do you think they would be interested in and would enjoy working on?
– What skills or expertise would you want them to have?
– What strengths have you observed in them?

– What qualities would you like to see them improve?
– What challenges or difficulties are they struggling with?

Experimenting with Books

Review the topics you've listed with your tutor. Discuss which you think are the most important or valuable—which would be the best use of your time.

Choose the most promising one and research a book on that topic.[1] Make a list of all the interesting books you find. (Maintain this Book List as part of your Knowledge Management System). Choose your favorite book and buy it.[2] Note how much time and effort you spent looking. Have your tutor (or someone whose judgment you trust) buy you a book on the same topic, and ask them how long they spent looking.

This is an exercise to get you thinking about and pursuing valuable areas of study, but it's also an experiment to juxtapose your learning choices and those of others on your behalf. How do you feel about reading "your" book compared to "their" book? How did you go about making your choice, and how did they? Who put more effort into their search? After reading both books, which did you prefer and why? Did the different choices complement each other? Was the book chosen for you less relevant to your interests, or did it spark an interest you didn't know you had? (Also relevant to these questions is the discussion material: How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn?)

If you found this experiment helpful, repeat it with other important topics from your lists.

Related:
– Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?

Footnotes

[1] I recommend books as a medium here because:
1. Books are where qualified scholars treat their subjects with the most depth and complexity (at least for the layperson).
2. Reading a book is a commitment. It cultivates (and rewards) the kind of sustained attention

necessary for disciplined intellectual work.
3. The best that humanity has thought or said tends to reside in books.

> Reading a physical book in a slow, deliberative, and careful manner sharpens a type of innovative, empathetic, creative, and critical thinking that is otherwise hard for humans to access. It requires us to literally rewire our brain to do that type of thinking, and without a concerted effort we will not develop those skills. If we avoid the slow and deliberate reading of actual physical books, if we mainly consume information on screens … the sophistication with which [we] understand and later make sense of information is decreased. …
>
> We need to think about a serious reading habit as an exceptional activity, one that you need to isolate and support and really prioritize in your life. … I'm increasingly convinced that the serious reading of good books needs to be in all our personal definitions of a deep life. [Cal Newport, "The Joys of the Reading Life," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 6 March 2023, 15:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=807retANzfA]

For more on the virtues of reading, see: What is the power of words? Why should we learn to write, speak, and read well?

[2] If you aren't able to buy a book, you can look for other free, online, long-form resources on your chosen topic.

Strategies for Cultivating Vocation

We all want our work to be enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful. How do you go about achieving this admirable (yet often elusive) goal?

The clichés "do what you love" and "follow your passion" assume you know what these things are. Most people don't. (Even if you did, you should ask: Is this something I should do for a living, or should it be a hobby?) More importantly, these clichés often have it backward: you don't love some work then dedicate yourself to it. You don't have a preexisting passion then follow it. You dedicate yourself to something, then with enough time and effort you may enjoy, even love, doing it. You endure challenge and discomfort, you focus persistently on a task until you've acquired a valuable skill—then you have the makings of a passion.[1]

Vocations don't begin as vocations. They begin as curiosities, interesting problems, general strengths or aptitudes. It is dedication to these things that grows them into vocations. The word "passion" comes from a Latin word meaning "to suffer"; this implies that a passion isn't something you stumble upon or follow blissfully, but something you earn through continual hard work, when you could be doing something else, despite difficulty and resistance, and without feeling certain that fate has called you to it.[2]

Now, the question is: How do you know what to work on, dedicate yourself to, suffer for? How do you begin to cultivate a vocation you enjoy (most of the time)?

1. First, make these questions important to you. Keep them in mind. Be more sensitive to what you find interesting, meaningful, and valuable. See the world through the lens of vocational possibility and you'll recognize opportunities for enjoyable work where you wouldn't have before.

2. You need feedback from experience to figure out what kind of work suits you. "We learn who we are in practice, not in theory."[3] Sample a variety of work, reflect on what you've learned about your abilities, interests, and values, then iterate. "You need to try new activities, visit new places and meet new people. You need to put yourself in the way of new opportunities and test yourself in different circumstances. ... If you don't try new things then you may never find out what you are capable of."[4]

3. Evaluate your interests,[5] strengths, weaknesses, and personality. What is important to you? To what degree are you influenced by the desire for fame, fortune,[6] or power[7] instead of the desire to find work you enjoy and can do at the limits of your ability?[8] Are you limiting your vocational choices based on a sense of self that is too narrow[9] or inauthentic?[10] Do you already know what you're good at or interested in, but are ignoring or avoiding it?

4. In addition, think about the following: What skills can I develop that are flexible and in-demand?[11] What are some important, under-served problems I can apply myself to?[12] What work should I choose in order to do the most good in the world?[13] What inspires gratitude in me, and could be a source of meaningful service to others?[14] How can I incorporate several of my diverse interests to do something unique?[15]

5. Continue to learn about as much as you can. The more you learn about the world, the greater breadth of vocational possibility you'll expose.

6. Cut out your work for yourself as much as possible. Working only on what others tell you to isn't the best way to discover your talents or interests. This can be difficult because we are raised on prescribed (often unwanted) work, and tend to want only recreation afterward. But in order to find work you love, or accomplish anything great, you need to learn to work for yourself, without anyone telling you to, even when you could justify not working.[16]

7. Develop the habits that enable you to do focused, deep work. Practice time-management: plan your days, block out time for specific tasks, set SMART goals. Create one place to capture the information relevant to your vocational journey.[17]

8. Wherever you are on your search for vocation, don't just *consider* possibilities, start *trying* things, start *making* things. This protects you from discovering too late that you don't actually enjoy work that you *think* you would enjoy. Build evidence of your knowledge and skills—ways to signal to other people that you're interested, active, and competent.[18]

9. Don't put off choosing a direction because you think:

a) You only have one shot so your choice needs to be perfect. (If you wait for this certainty, you'll be waiting forever.)

b) You'll be locked into whatever you choose. (There will be opportunities to change direction later—sometimes against your will; better to make changes informed by experience you've accrued along the way.)

c) You'll be ruined if you fail. (You're stronger than you think. And failure is a valuable opportunity for course correction and anti-fragility: becoming stronger through adversity.[19])

As long as you're making informed, autonomous choices, working hard, and learning something, your experiences will lead you in the right direction. The person who tries many things, experiences failure, and develops courage in the face of risk is better-off than the person who tries only what is safe, fears failure, and is disheartened when confronting the risks needed to grow and thrive.

10. Network. Talk to real-world people about work. Look for mentors, role models, opportunities for apprenticeships, or any kind of exposure to appealing work—and initiate contact with these people. Connect with those who share your interests and support one another. Use the resources of your school's career office even if you aren't sure what you want to do.

11. Research. Look for data about the fields you're interested in. Are these fields in-demand, growing or shrinking? What kind of education/training/certification do they require? What breadth of opportunity will certain educational paths enable? What do people in those fields have to say about their jobs and lifestyles? Look for current employment statistics (job satisfaction, remuneration, paths for advancement, etc.) to help you anticipate what a vocational choice entails.

12. You'll never have perfect information when making career choices. No amount of data will absolve you of the responsibility of choosing a direction, and implementing that choice with confidence and commitment. You should still gather a reasonable amount of information to make a good choice, but there will always be risk and uncertainty. (You must even decide how pertinent information applies to you and not merely the "average" person.)

13. There's a difference between loving the content of your work and being satisfied with the conditions around which that work is done. The latter includes factors such as: relationships with colleagues and superiors, others' appreciation for your work, job security, autonomy,[20] attractive salary, work-life balance, benefits, etc.[21] These things are

important for overall work happiness, but they are more helpful when asking, say: Which of these particular job offers is better for me, considering my skills? rather than: What skills should I develop in the first place?

While interest in what you're working on contributes to workplace happiness, it's more helpful to think of interest as fuel used to develop the mastery that actually makes work fulfilling. It is this mastery (having rare and valuable skills) that most often opens the doors to the things that make a job generally satisfying.[22] Smart employers will offer the most enticing work environment to attract and retain the most valuable employees. Valuable employees can leverage their mastery to achieve the most satisfying work conditions.

14. No work is enjoyable all the time; there's always some drudgery and dissatisfaction. Have a limit to how much you should endure before doing something else, but bear in mind that no job is perfect, and when you're starting out you'll have to pay your dues. There is a normal period of difficulty when initial results are not proportionate to the effort you put in; and when learning a craft there is a period before you reach the intrinsic rewards that make an activity self-sustaining. Don't give up too soon: "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."

15. Satisfying work is often difficult, so, naturally, there will be resistance to it. Even if you're doing work that's suited to your talents and interests—work that you are certain you ought to be doing—there will be distracting, discouraging forces to contend with. Overcoming these deterring voices (both internal and external) and getting to work anyway is often what separates the good from the great, the amateur from the professional.[23]

16. Most people don't find one job and do it forever; deciding what to work on is often an ongoing process. Regularly ask how to best match your work with your skills, interests, and currently valuable opportunities.

17. Career paths are often unpredictable and erratic. Most people can't anticipate very far in advance the particular job they will settle into, either because unexpected opportunities arise or their interests or values change. This is why it's often better to develop flexible skills when you're starting out. It's also why "a common trait of people who find fulfillment in their careers is a focus on short term planning. ... They say: Here's who I am right now, here are my skills and interests, here are the opportunities in front of me. I'll try this one. Here's my hypothesis about what I'll learn, and a year from now I'll change because I'll have learned something new."[24]

18. Whatever you're doing, do a good job (even if, at first, you don't like it). A significant part of work satisfaction comes from the effort or care we put into it, as well as how we treat the people we encounter.[25] Work mindfully: make a conscious effort to enjoy the *journey* of vocation, care for your work and fellow workers *in the present*, and don't lose yourself in a distant future or trivial measures of success.

19. Appreciate the contribution your work makes to society. Even the least prestigious jobs solve valuable problems for real people and make the world better in some way. This contribution may not always be apparent (or proportionately rewarded) so make an effort to remember and draw upon this source of satisfaction.[26]

20. Take a step back sometimes and ask not "What kind of job do I want?" but "What kind of person do I want to be?"[27] Tend to your character in the broad sense, and consider how to cultivate the life you want, not merely the job. Let this life-vision inform your choice of vocation.[28]

21. Consider how your economic decisions as a consumer influence the work opportunities that exist.[29] What values do you communicate (and propagate) through the products and services you employ?[30]

22. Consider how you can help others find work that suits them. Cultivate community. Through your own "social network"—through every person you help or friend you make—you become a valuable resource for those who get to know you. When you progress to positions of leadership, create opportunities for people to get meaningful experience; help guide the young and old toward satisfying work.[31]

Footnotes

[1] Paul Graham, "How to Do What You Love," Jan. 2008, https://paulgraham.com/love.html

Cal Newport, "'Follow Your Passion' Is Bad Advice," *YouTube*, uploaded by 99U, 18 Sept. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIMu1PGbG-0

Cal Newport, *So Good They Can't Ignore You: Why Skills Trump Passion in the Quest for Work You Love*, Business Plus / Grand Central, 2012

> What most of us think of when we think of passion is a sudden, all-at-once discovery ... But a first encounter with what might *eventually* lead to a lifelong passion is exactly that—just the opening scene in a much longer, less dramatic narrative. ...

> [H]ere's what science has to say: passion for your work is a little bit of *discovery*, followed by a lot of *development*, and then a lifetime of *deepening*. [Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Scribner / Simon & Schuster, 2016, p. 103]

[2]

> [W]hat we get out of life is not determined by the good feelings we desire but by what bad feelings we're willing and able to sustain to get us to those good feelings. ...
>
> What determines your success isn't "What do you want to enjoy?" The question is, "What pain do you want to sustain?" The quality of your life is not determined by the quality of your positive experiences but the quality of your negative experiences. And to get good at dealing with negative experiences is to get good at dealing with life. ... Because if you want the benefits of something in life, you have to also want the costs. [Mark Manson, "Finding Your Life Purpose: An Unconventional Guide to Figuring Out What to Do With Your Life," ebook, 2018, pp. 12-14, https://markmanson.net/downloads]

[3] [Herminia Ibarra, quoted in "David Epstein in Conversation with Malcolm Gladwell," *YouTube*, uploaded by The 92nd Street Y, New York, 25 Feb. 2020, 33:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jd6QQBP3rO8]

[4] [Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 5-10, 17]

> [Y]ou need to make yourself a big target for luck, and the way to do that is to be curious. Try lots of things, meet lots of people, read lots of books, ask lots of questions. [Paul Graham, "How to Do Great Work," July 2023, https://www.paulgraham.com/greatwork.html]

[5] A common test for assessing interests and character, and corresponding careers, is the Holland Code test:
Occupational Information Network – Interest Profiler
Open Psychometrics – Holland Code (RIASEC) Test

On the role of interest in doing great work: Paul Graham, "The Bus Ticket Theory of Genius"

[6]

> [C]hildren must understand that money is a means to an end—hopefully, a noble one—rather than an end in itself. It is the glamorization of money for its own sake, as little more than a superficial ego boost, that leads young people down barren paths. ... [T]rue success requires a sense of meaning that runs deeper than fortune and fame. The accumulation of material success without an ultimate concern, some larger purpose that the material success is meant to serve, is a prescription for a dispiriting sense of emptiness once the initial glow of self-gratification has worn off. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 108]

> [T]he majority of people worldwide, regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status appear to be relatively happy as long as their basic needs are met. ... Summarizing years of work on the relationship between money and happiness, one prominent researcher [David Lykken] writes: "People who go to work in their overalls and on the bus are just as happy, on the average, as those in suits who drive to work in their own Mercedes."
>
> In spite of these findings, most people in this country believe that having more money would indeed make them happier. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 37-39]

[7] "How to Love Your Work," *YouTube*, uploaded by The School of Life, 7 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sVrUTRjjVc

[8]

> [I]t is within our power to tell our children ... the absolute truth. *They will have succeeded if they discover something they love doing and learn how to do it well*. To say that this accomplishment is more important than making a lot of money and more important than fame or prestige is not idealism. For those of us who have been lucky enough to be happy in our adult vocations or avocations, it is the reality of our lives.
>
> Educational success needs to be redefined accordingly. The goal of education is to bring children into adulthood having discovered things they enjoy doing and doing them at the outermost limits of their potential. The goal applies equally to every child, across the entire range of every ability. There are no first-class and second-class ways to enjoy the exercise of our realized capacities. It is a quintessentially *human* satisfaction, and its universality can connect us all. Opening the door to that satisfaction is what real education does. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008), p. 168]

[9]

> [Y]ou have to get to know yourself better. You have to spend time with yourself, apart from other people's opinions of you. ... [Y]ou may need to see yourself differently. [Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 5-10]

> I discovered that self-esteem was a critical factor in the career assessment and planning equation. People rise to the level of success that their self-esteem can absorb. Those with low self-esteem don't feel worthy of the rewards that come with success, however they define it. So often, people will talk about their fear of failure and I will find that it's a mask for the fear of success. Underneath it is the feeling that I don't deserve whatever success there might be in life. [Dr. Brian Schwartz, Dean of The Institute for Career and Talent Management in

> Beijing, quoted by Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, p. 49]

> The greatest problem in education is posed, not by the limitations of the child, but by what he thinks his limitations are. If a child knows that his IQ score is low, he may lose hope and believe that success is beyond him. In education, we should direct our energies toward increasing the confidence and interest of a child and in removing the limits that, through his interpretation of life, he has set on his own powers. [Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, 1931, Hazelden Foundation, 1998, p. 133]

[10] > [Successful therapy helps a person discover] how much of his life is guided by what he thinks he *should* be, not by what he is. Often he discovers that he exists only in response to the demands of others, that he seems to have no self of his own, that he is only trying to think, and feel, and behave in a way that others believe he *ought* to think, and feel and behave. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 110]

[11] Benjamin Todd, "To Find Work You Love, Don't (Always) Follow Your Passion," https://80000hours.org/articles/dont-follow-your-passion/

[12] Mark Manson, "How to Find the Perfect Career," https://markmanson.net/how-to-find-the-perfect-career

[13] 80,000 Hours – How to Make a Difference With Your Career

William MacAskill, "Want to make a difference? Don't Work for a Charity," *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx, 25 June 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hU5O4PhrOik

[14] > [G]ratitude is a window into purpose, because it helps us identify the things that we find particularly significant in our lives. When we express our thanks, we increase our awareness of what is most valuable in life, and we communicate this awareness to others around us. From gratitude springs not only an enhanced appreciation for our own blessings but also a desire to pass such blessings along to others—the heart and soul of purpose." [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 141]

[15] This idea has also been called "talent stacking": combining different skills to offer a product or service that is more rare and valuable than any one skill.

"Make $100,000 Per Year, The Easiest Way," *YouTube*, uploaded by Better Than Yesterday, 25 July 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW2Kr0l2kGg

[16] Paul Graham, "How To Work Hard," June 2021, http://www.paulgraham.com/hwh.html

[17] Here are three video playlists that offer valuable productivity tools:

Cal Newport – Core Ideas

Ali Abdaal – Productivity Club

Better Than Yesterday – Productivity and Success

[18]

> Each year, Bill Fitzsimmons [the Harvard dean of admissions] explained, several hundred students are admitted to Harvard on the merits of truly outstanding academic credentials. ...
>
> But Harvard admits at least as many students who, in Bill's words, "have made a commitment to pursue something they love, believe in, and value—and [have done] so with singular energy, discipline, and plain old hard work." [Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Scribner / Simon & Schuster, 2016, p. 235]

[19] Jonathan Haidt, "3 great untruths to stop telling kids—and ourselves," *YouTube*, uploaded by Big Think, 27 Oct. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzGH97DQzA4

[20]

> In 1964, the sociologists Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler surveyed 3,100 American men about their jobs and found that the key to understanding which jobs were satisfying was what they called "occupational self direction." Men who were closely supervised in jobs of low complexity and much routine showed the highest degree of alienation (feeling powerless, dissatisfied, and separated from the work). Men who had more latitude in deciding how they approached work that was varied and challenging tended to enjoy their work more. When workers had occupational self-direction, their work was often satisfying." [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 221-222]

[21] Jacob Morgan, "The Top 10 Factors For On-The-Job Employee Happiness," *Forbes*, 2014, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacobmorgan/2014/12/15/the-top-10-factors-for-on-the-job-employee-happiness/?sh=5f4a7bc95afa

[22] Cal Newport, "Core Idea: Don't Follow Your Passion," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 10 Feb. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjiP6sDyN-E

[23] Steven Pressfield, "The Amateur vs The Professional," *YouTube*, uploaded by Individuation Portal, 29 April 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV2DBexkpaU

Steven Pressfield, *Turning Pro: Tap Your Inner Power and Create Your Life's Work*, Black Irish Entertainment, 2012

[24] ["David Epstein in Conversation with Malcolm Gladwell," *YouTube*, uploaded by The 92nd Street Y, New York, 25 Feb. 2020, 46:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jd6QQBP3rO8]

[25]

> You might think that blue-collar workers have jobs, managers have careers, and the more respected professionals (doctors, scientists, clergy) have callings. Although there is some truth to that expectation, we can nonetheless paraphrase Marcus Aurelius and say, "Work itself is but what you deem it." Amy Wrzesniewski, a psychologist at New York University, finds all three orientations represented in almost every occupation she has examined. ...
>
> The optimistic conclusion coming out of research in positive psychology is that most people can get more satisfaction from their work. [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 221-222]

> Motivation will come naturally when you take ownership in your work. ["Yakiniku Her Way," *Samurai Gourmet*, screenplay by Kiyohito Wada, season 1, episode 4, *Netflix*, 2017]

[26]

> Vital in appreciating the role of a sense of calling is that people understand that this can be found in even what may appear to be mundane jobs and endeavors. ...
>
> A purpose can be noble without being "heroic" or requiring daring, life-endangering adventures. Noble purposes may mean this, ... *but noble purposes also may be found in the day-to-day fabric of ordinary existence*. A mother caring for her child, a teacher instructing her students, a doctor treating patients, a citizen campaigning for a candidate for the sake of improving the community, all are pursuing noble purposes. So too are the legions of ordinary people who dedicate time, care, effort, and worldly goods to charity, to their friends and family, to their communities, to their faith, or to their responsibilities at work. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 43-44]

[27]

> [A person] is not to be only a voter and a subject of law; he is also to be a member of a family, himself responsible, in all probability, in turn, for rearing and training of future children, and thus maintaining the continuity of society. He is to be a worker, engaged in some occupation which will be of use to society, and which will maintain his own independence and self-respect. He is to be a member of some particular neighborhood and community, and must contribute to the values of life, add to the decencies and graces of civilization wherever he is. [John Dewey, "Ethical Principals Underlying Education," 1897, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, Chicago UP, 1974, pp. 112-113]

[28] Cal Newport calls this "Lifestyle-Centric Career Planning": Form a specific vision for your life, in the near to intermediate future, including the physical environment, social environment, the stress,

pace, and general atmosphere of your life, your mental and spiritual life, what your time outside of work is occupied with—then ask: How much money am I going to need for this life? Where would I need to live? What type and how much work would I be doing? With these answers in mind, look for jobs and skills that will help achieve your vision.

Cal Newport, "Using Lifestyle-Centric Career Planning To Pursue A Life You Love," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 20 Oct. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpSlr5TYAEw

Cal Newport, "Top Advice for Young People Starting Their Careers," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 25 Aug. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI0szDvBNSA

[29] Most jobs have little meaning because they produce (crap) things that don't really improve people's lives. Consumer demand (manipulated by marketing) is directly related to the quality of jobs that exist. If consumers demand meaningless crap, then there will be meaningless crap jobs. ["How to Find Meaningful Work," *YouTube*, uploaded by The School of Life, 5 Oct. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H91JDqeR_jg]

[30] [A] culture of purpose must be built—and continually rebuilt—in multiple small ways, by both individuals and institutions, that take responsibility for the values they present through their words, their deeds, and the examples they set. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 163]

[31] What kinds of guidance do our young encounter [in our communities and in the popular culture]? This is the greatest lottery in youth development. ...

From the cultural information they receive, young people learn *boundaries*—what's permissible to do and what's not—and also *positive examples*—what it is possible to aim for in one's search for achievement and fulfillment. This is the social learning that the adult community must provide for its young people if they are to find a positive direction in life. If we leave the source of such social learning to chance, some youngsters will find productive paths on their own; many others will become confused or misled by the culture's many corrosive influences. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 115-116]

Tools to Improve Learning

Learning is a skill, like any other, that you can improve. Here are some strategies to help you learn more efficiently:

1. Approach your learning goals with the tools of effective habit formation. Don't just aim to complete a single task—aim to make learning a regular, natural part of your life. Apply these techniques to prepare for, execute, and reward your learning behaviors.

2. Control and budget your time. Plan specific work in specific blocks of time using a calendar.[1] Mark due dates and tests, and schedule proactive ways to prepare for them. Take advantage of all the available time in your day, even if it's brief, the earlier the better.

3. Optimize your workspace. Make the place where you learn special and personal; associate it with deep thinking and meaningful work. Make the space comfortable and ergonomically sound, somewhere you prefer to spend time. Keep it as distraction-free as possible.[2]

4. Approach learning with an alert, focused mind. This is best achieved with a foundation of good sleep, diet, exercise, and relaxation.

5. Before you start studying, remind yourself why your learning goals are necessary and important to you. Your perceived need to change and grow influences your mind/body's level of neuroplasticity. (Think of how much faster you'd learn a language if you needed to in order to communicate at all.) Approaching a task with indifference limits your ability to learn. Especially if the material isn't very interesting or engaging, remind yourself how your efforts will eventually benefit you and others.[3]

6. Think about your work as a function of both time and intensity. Your time is valuable, don't waste it with pseudo work, just going through the motions. If you really focus and think deeply about the task at hand, if you forego all distractions,[4] you'll learn much more efficiently. You can improve your intensity with the right tools and consistent practice.[5]

7. Active recall is one of the most effective ways to learn. Test yourself. Try to reproduce information from memory, without books or notes, as if you were teaching it to someone. (This is opposed to passive recall: re-reading notes or highlighting passages, which often gives the mere illusion of fluency.)

Here are some ways to practice active recall:

– Use flashcards, testing yourself more frequently on material you know the least.[6]

– As you read, frame important concepts as questions you can ask yourself later.

– Summarize as you read: after a few paragraphs, or a distinct passage, write down (or say aloud) a brief summary from memory. Do the same for subsequent passages, also adding a summary of all you've read prior.[7]

– Ideally, teach what you've learned to another interested person who can ask you questions and expose weaknesses in your understanding. Otherwise, imagine you are speaking to such a person, and explain what you're studying.

– As you test yourself, exhaust your inner resources before looking up an answer. Allow yourself to struggle as you search your memory.[8]

– The best kind of tests for the purposes of studying have open ended, short answer questions with minimal prompts (as opposed to multiple choice).[9]

8. Space out your learning. Avoid studying in single, long blocks of time in which focus and intensity taper off. Break up learning into multiple sessions over days and weeks. Test yourself as soon as possible after being exposed to material to prevent forgetting.

9. Keep bouts of learning relatively short, and relax afterward. For every ~45 minutes of work, go for a ~5-10 minute walk or take some kind of break. The amount of time you're able to do focused work will depend on how much practice you've had. If you're just starting out, you may need to aim a little lower. But try to push the limit of how much high-quality work you can do. Set an alarm to let you know when your target time has been reached.

While on your break, don't do a different cognitively demanding task (like check emails or social media). This is called context switching, and it makes it harder to focus once you return to your task. Frequent context shifts (and distractions in general) contribute to mental fatigue.[10]

10. Try to understand material at a conceptual level, don't just commit it to memory. Think about the meaning of what you're learning. How does it fit into the big picture of the subject? How does it relate to other things you already know? Try to understand the general principles of your subject and how they can be applied broadly.

If you have to memorize facts that are hard to conceptualize, use mnemonic devices like acronyms, rhyming phrases, visual associations, etc.

11. Work with other people some of the time (but don't let them do your work for you). Form learning accountability groups: tell each other what you'll be working on, then get together to share what you've done. Test each other and review each other's work.

12. Spend time learning the things on which you'll make mistakes. Provided you're working earnestly, making errors improves your ability to learn. Errors cue the mind/body to enter a state of greater neuroplasticity in order to change and adapt.

Associate the feeling of making mistakes with positive motivation and growth. Train yourself to overcome frustration and embrace errors as beneficial.[11]

13. To minimize procrastination you can create your own deadlines when a goal or due date is far enough away to be unmotivating. Make your first deadline easy and immediate to build momentum.[12]

14. Reduce your impulsiveness and susceptibility to distraction. Turn off unnecessary notifications on your phone. Silence your phone while you're working, keep it out of sight or in another room. Work in plain rooms on clean desks; work in a library or someplace away from home if the distractions there are too much. If necessary, use browser blockers to forbid distracting websites, or print things out to avoid digital temptations altogether. Schedule specific times (apart from your work) for the things that are likely to distract you. To minimize distraction more generally, limit your use of smart phones and social media to ways that improve your life.[13]

Practice mindfulness. One of the aims of mindfulness meditation is to become more aware of distracting thoughts as they arise. This will help you detect when your focus begins to drift, and guide yourself, kindly, back to your task.[14]

15. Keep a work-progress journal: each morning (or the night before) write down what you plan to get done. Be realistic. (Perhaps no more than three work-related tasks per day.) Record whether you complete these tasks, and if not, write down why. You'll learn to notice, and hopefully avoid, what keeps you from getting things done. You can also proactively ask what obstacles may hinder your goals when you set them, and make a plan to avoid or overcome those obstacles.

16. If you're really dreading a task, make working on it special in some way: study in your favorite place, give yourself an unusual reward.

17. Build a solid routine. The more habitual your learning behaviors are—the more thoroughly you plan your days—the less impulsive and prone to procrastination you'll be.

18. Don't let yourself get fatigued. Anticipate busy, hard days and distribute your work accordingly. Take care of your mind and body, and rest when you need to. If you're going to prioritize effortful work, you should also dedicate some time for recovery.

19. Study how you study. Experiment with different learning strategies, resources, mediums, etc. and take notes on what works for you. After an exam or any kind of performance, review your preparation: What did you do that mattered most? What didn't help at all? How can you refine your study plan to perform better next time? Seek feedback from teachers and experts. Develop how you learn and work best based on evidence you collect over time.[15]

20. Find the best material to learn from. Even when material is chosen for you, seek out the best supplemental material. Improving *how* you study will matter much less if you don't carefully choose *what* you study. Take advantage of the insights of others who have already learned what you're learning.

21. Document and organize your learning in a knowledge management system. Create one place where you can capture all your work and the valuable resources you've found.

Footnotes

[1] > [T]he ability to plan is a part of motivation. Indeed, ... we will consider the possibility that *motives* are actually just *plans* by a different name. This suggests that teaching students to be more planful will actually enhance their willingness to learn, and for the right reasons. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 42]

[2] Huberman Lab, "5 Science-Based Steps to Improve Your Workspace," 17 March 2022, https://www.hubermanlab.com/newsletter/5-science-based-steps-to-improve-your-workspace

Huberman Lab, "Teach & Learn Better With A 'Neuroplasticity Super Protocol'," 29 Oct. 2021, https://www.hubermanlab.com/newsletter/teach-and-learn-better-with-a-neuroplasticity-super-protocol

[3] Andrew Huberman, "Using Failures, Movement & Balance to Learn Faster," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 15 Feb. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx3U64IXFOY

Andrew Huberman, "Optimal Protocols for Studying & Learning," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 26 Aug. 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddq8JIMhz7c

[4] You may think that small distractions aren't a problem, that they don't disrupt your focus too much. And sometimes this may be the case. But by refusing even brief distractions you renew your commitment to the task at hand, you reinforce the importance of your goals, and you strengthen your willpower to refuse even greater distractions when necessary.

[5] "Heroic Interview: How to Become a Straight-A Student with Cal Newport," *YouTube*, uploaded by Brian Johnson, 23 Sept. 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgfOHQKldy0

[6] Wikipedia – Spaced Repetition

[7] Jeffrey Kaplan, "Lecture #9: How to read so that you retain information," *YouTube*, uploaded by Jeffrey Kaplan, 17 Aug. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiNB-6SuqVA

[8] Goodnotes, "7 Practical Ways to Apply Active Recall When Studying," 30 June 2024, https://www.goodnotes.com/blog/active-recall-studying

[9] Andrew Huberman, "Optimal Protocols for Studying & Learning," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 26 Aug. 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddq8JIMhz7c

[10] Cal Newport, "Why You're Always Tired & Exhausted (No Matter What You Do)," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 25 Sept. 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15fHZpy3bx0

[11] Andrew Huberman, "Using Failures, Movement & Balance to Learn Faster," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 15 Feb. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx3U64IXFOY

[12] Jeffrey Kaplan, "Lecture #7: my method for defeating procrastination," *YouTube*, uploaded by Jeffrey Kaplan, 26 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2EEnJedcYU

Ethan Schwandt, "The Procrastination Equation – Piers Steel PhD (Mind Map Book Summary)," *YouTube*, uploaded by Ethan Schwandt, 17 June 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFbElPk4uqw

[13] Cal Newport, "The Perks of Living Without Social Media," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 15 May 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6AF_aFuD8w

Cal Newport, "How To Cure Your Phone & Social Media Addiction (My 3-Step Process)," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 18 Sept. 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYNzBwLZNes

[14] > Mindfulness is a broader and larger function than concentration. It is an all-encompassing function. Concentration is exclusive. It settles down on one item and ignores everything else. Mindfulness is inclusive. It stands back from the focus of attention and watches with a broad focus, quick to notice any change that occurs. If you have focused the mind on a stone, concentration will see only the stone. Mindfulness stands back from this process, aware of the stone, aware of concentration focusing on the stone, aware of the intensity of that focus, and instantly aware of the shift of attention when concentration is distracted. It is mindfulness that notices that the distraction has occurred, and it is mindfulness that redirects the attention to the stone. [Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 1991, Wisdom Publications, 2014, p. 147]

[15] Cal Newport, "Make Learning As Addictive As Social Media," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 6 Nov. 2023, 40:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOPBN1kj5Xc

Tools to Create Effective Habits

Achieving goals is much less a matter of sheer willpower than the accumulation of small, consistent behaviors. Goals will give you a direction, but progress requires good habits and systems to support them.[1] Here are some techniques to help you develop strong habits.

1. List some goals you would like to work toward. Make them specific, measurable, time-bound, moderately challenging, and in alignment with your other long-term goals and values.[2] Take ownership of them, even if you didn't make them by yourself. You'll be more motivated to pursue goals over which you exercise agency, choice, and control.[3]

2. For each goal, list the specific habits that will lead to the outcome you want, as well as any bad habits that will get in the way. Many goal pursuits will benefit from seemingly unrelated habits, so consider your behavior holistically.[4] Each important area for mental and physical health (sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation) has profound effects on one another and on your general level of motivation. Look for these related "keystone" habits when considering which ones are relevant to your goals.

3. Address the most important habits first. Estimate how much effort each one will require, and how many you can realistically handle at one time. Taking on too many will lower your chances of success. Don't hesitate to start with just one habit if you need to.[5]

4. For each habit, set a specific time (or block of time) and place. Write the following sentence down in a planner, calendar, or journal: "I will [do this new behavior] at [this time] in [this location] for [this long]." Writing on actual paper tends to reinforce the goal setting process more than other mediums.[6]

5. When beginning a new habit, make it easy enough that when motivation is low and life is busy you can still make time for it. Decide on a minimum time or effort that is doable but non-trivial.[7] (e.g. a two minute workout, flossing one tooth, reading one page, etc.)

6. As a general rule, plan the habits that are hardest to engage in, that require the most energy to initiate, in the first 8 hours after waking up. This is when the brain and body are more action and focus oriented. Plan activities that put up the least resistance in the 9-15 hours after waking. Observe how your energy and effort change throughout the day and schedule your habits accordingly.[8]

7. Visualize the behavior beforehand. Think about the specific sequence of steps that are required to execute the habit, from start to finish. Also visualize the positive outcomes of your success (both immediate and long-term)—how good you'll feel afterward, etc. If you feel unmotivated and resistance is high, it will help to visualize the negative outcomes of your failure—how bad you will feel if you don't achieve your goal, etc.

8. Consistency is key. If you're in danger of missing a day, just show up. Don't break the chain of continuity. If you miss a day, don't try to compensate by doing more, just continue normally. Once a habit is consistent, then you can increase the duration or change the time and place to make it less context-dependent.

9. Attach new habits to existing habits. Associate a new behavior with a "trigger" behavior that's already a natural or automatic part of your day. (e.g. associate waking up with drinking water, or driving home from work with going to the gym) When you write down the specific time and place you'll perform a habit, preface the sentence with "After I [do this existing behavior], I will ... "[9]

10. Design your environment to support your positive habits and inhibit your negative ones. (e.g. leave a glass of water by your bed to drink in the morning, place a book or notebook by the chair you'll sit in, leave your guitar out of its case and in view, pin up images or symbols of your goals to motivate you or cue a behavior, etc.) Prepare your environment to make habits as simple and frictionless as possible. When using visual reminders, update or change them regularly, otherwise you're likely to adapt to their presence and ignore them.[10]

Design your social environment as well. Surround yourself with people who encourage the goals and identity you aspire to. Find groups to support your habits and provide the added reward of social interaction. Have an accountability partner, someone to report to who can celebrate successes with you.[11] Beware of telling people about your goals before working toward them, as this may provide rewarding feedback for the mere intention, making it less likely you'll actually pursue your goals.

11. Behaviors with long-term, delayed rewards benefit from some kind of immediate positive reinforcement. Create ways to enjoy and reward these behaviors in the moment or shortly after. Celebrate wins with (a harmless amount of) your favorite food, entertainment, form of relaxation, time with a loved one, a cognitive reward like positive affirmations, etc.

Attach a desired habit to a pleasurable behavior, and forgo that behavior unless you're performing that habit (e.g. only listen to your favorite music, podcasts, audiobooks when you're working out).

When you reach a milestone, give yourself a reward that reinforces your goals (e.g. new exercise equipment for working out, a new book for reading regularly, new cookware for sticking to a diet). The most reinforcing rewards are random and intermittent; when you feel rewards start to lose their motivating power, flip a coin to decide whether you will reward yourself that day.[12]

12. Track your progress. Visual indicators of success (like checking a box or adding a bean to a jar) hold you accountable and are ways to reward yourself in the moment. Record and appreciate these small victories. Record failures too, allow them to register, but don't punish yourself for them. Measure your progress in small intervals to accentuate growth and increase motivation. At the end of the day and week, review your progress.[13]

13. Prepare for adversity. Have a plan for when your motivation is low and resistance is high, when you confront pain, stress, or temptation. Anticipate triggers, and prepare alternative behaviors.[14]

Know that when you're starting out it's normal to work hard for relatively little result. Even after all the tips, tricks, and hacks, sometimes you just won't feel like it. Remember that with each repetition you're carving out a path (in your mind and body) that will get easier and make you stronger. Small gains will compound into significant progress in the long term.

14. Change your identity. Decide what kind of person you want to be and embody that role. With each small win, each act of dedication, you prove to yourself that you are a runner, a reader, an artist, etc.—someone who cares for themselves, who can do hard things, overcome resistance, and live in accordance with their values.[15] (Call upon these positive affirmations to reward successful habits.) No matter your level of skill or expertise, if you're working hard on a habit you're proud of, claim the title, incorporate the identity, and use it to empower your ongoing efforts.

15. Change your mindset. Your habits are not immutable qualities of character, but matters of small, consistent, achievable efforts. You can design the systems and lifestyles that support these efforts. You can choose the goals and values that guide these systems. Making

and breaking habits is hard. Difficulty, far from signaling a lack of talent or innate ability, is a signal that you are pushing your limits. If you persevere, you will grow.

Your understanding of *why* you're doing something affects the results you'll see.[16] When we act voluntarily, deliberately, even happily, we see more positive effects than when our actions are forced or resented. When you think of a behavior like exercise, don't think of fatigue or pain, but health and well-being. Cleaning your house isn't a dull chore, you're creating an environment conducive to peace of mind.[17] Associate hard habits with positive experience; associate difficulty itself with strength and growth.

When making new habits, you're bound to fail sometime. How you treat yourself when you do, and how you perceive and respond to failure will be critical. Harsh self-talk isn't motivating; treat yourself with kindness and compassion. Failure is an opportunity to learn. What went wrong? How can you improve going forward? Revision and iteration are natural parts of forming personal, lasting habits. Missing one day of a habit is a valuable opportunity to develop a different habit: that of responding well to failure, with renewed resolve, so that you're back on track the next day.

16. Analyze your behaviors and motivations. What is the need being satisfied or the reward that drives a particular bad habit? Can you substitute a different, more healthy behavior that satisfies that need?

For example: If you're having trouble cutting sugar from your diet, ask why? What triggers your cravings? Is the issue environmental (are there too many sugary foods in your kitchen), social (are you enabled by other people), educational (are you unaware of the harms of excessive sugar consumption), therapeutic (is it a way to sooth the stress in your life), etc. The approach you take should be informed by your particular situation.

If you're stress-eating, address ways to reduce your stress as well as improve your diet. If you struggle to clean your room, change the habits that put it in disarray, as well as the systems to get it clean. For many new habits there is a related old habit that should be unmade concurrently.

If you don't know exactly why you're pursuing a habit, or your motivation feels inauthentic, learn about the benefits of that habit (and the detriment of its opposite).

17. Be the architect of your environment, not the victim of it.[18] Are the systems and environments you've inherited dictating your habits? Are you taking control of the things

that are within your power to control?[19] Is a fixed mindset keeping you from assuming responsibility for habits that you could change? Aspire to be the architect of your environment—of all your habits—not just on your behalf but on behalf of everyone you will influence.[20]

Focusing on habits more than goals puts you more firmly in the present. A goal is something to aim at, a destination, a momentary arrival that calls for another destination. Habits are the journey, they constitute the bulk of our lives. We should find happiness in our daily habits, and not imagine that an ideal happiness awaits us only when we arrive at some future goal. This type of process-orientation isn't just about increasing efficiency or productivity, it's about increasing your moment to moment well-being. Reviewing your progress at the end of the day isn't just an accountability measure, it's a way to find satisfaction in a day's work, in getting a little better than you were yesterday. Looking for the good in your regular behaviors and acknowledging your small successes in the present aren't just ways to reinforce habits, they're ways to achieve a more consistent and reliable happiness.

Footnotes

[1] James Clear, *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, Avery / Penguin Random House, 2018

[2] Jennifer Herrity, "How to Write SMART Goals (With Examples)," 11 Aug. 2025, https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-smart-goals

[3] Andrew Huberman and Maya Shankar, "How to Shape Your Identity & Goals," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 24 July 2023, 1:43:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8Hw8zeCDTA

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[5] Andrew Huberman, "The Science of Making & Breaking Habits," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 3 Jan. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wcs2PFz5q6g

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[7] Cal Newport, "How Can I Stick with Good Habit and Tips for More Than a Few Days?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 30 Jan. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqc9Y9TRVrw

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[10] Andrew Huberman, "Goals Toolkit: How to Set and Achieve Your Goals," *Spotify*, uploaded by Huberman Lab, 28 Aug. 2023, https://open.spotify.com/episode/0sFYKmVjh2gEfBWfj25DNk

[11] HabitShare is a good app for habit tracking and accountability.

[12] Andrew Huberman, "Goals Toolkit: How to Set and Achieve Your Goals," *Spotify*, uploaded by Huberman Lab, 28 Aug. 2023, https://open.spotify.com/episode/0sFYKmVjh2gEfBWfj25DNk

[13] Cal Newport, "How Can I Stick with Good Habit and Tips for More Than a Few Days?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 30 Jan. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqc9Y9TRVrw

"Deliberate Practice: Achieve Mastery in Anything," *YouTube*, uploaded by Sprouts, 5 Sept. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-sjUoGO250

[14] "The Power of Habit [by Charles Duhigg] Animated Summary," *YouTube*, uploaded by Wisdom for Life, 12 Feb. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMOZZ5uZgxA

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[18] James Clear, "Atomic Habits: How to Get 1% Better Every Day," *YouTube*, uploaded by APB Speakers, 7 Aug. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_nzqnXWvSo

[19] Dr. Rangan Chatterjee, "This Is Why You Feel Lost ... ," *YouTube*, uploaded by Dr Rangan Chatterjee, 4 May 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yL-1l4ToqDY

[20]

> Man himself may be controlled by his environment, but it is an environment which is almost wholly of his own making. The physical environment of most people is largely man-made. The surfaces a person walks on, the walls which shelter him, the clothing he wears, many of the foods he eats, the tools he uses, the vehicles he moves about in, most of the things he listens to and looks at are human products. The social environment is obviously man-made —it generates the language a person speaks, the customs he follows, and the behavior he exhibits with respect to the ethical, religious, governmental, economic, educational, and psychotherapeutic institutions which control him. The evolution of a culture is in fact a kind of gigantic exercise in self-control. As the individual controls himself by manipulating the world in which he lives, so the human species has constructed an environment in which its members behave in a highly effective way. Mistakes have been made, and we have no assurance that the environment man has constructed will continue to provide gains which outstrip the losses, but man as we know him, for better or worse, is what man has made of man. [B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Bantam, 1971, pp. 196-197]

Developing a Growth Mindset

Mindsets are mental frameworks for understanding and interacting with the world. In youth they're largely inherited and unconscious, but as you mature you can take greater control of them. You can improve your mental frameworks with the right tools and effort.[1]

Below is a list of the fundamental beliefs of the fixed and growth mindsets. In short, a fixed mindset is stifling, short-term, and fatalistic. While a growth mindset is just the opposite, and has been proven to do what its name implies—help people grow and thrive.[2] Unfortunately, many of us are inclined, by nature and nurture, to the former. To remedy this we should become more conscious of our internal narratives and those we take in from our surroundings.

It's important to be able to identify the fixed mindset (in thought, speech, and action) and replace it with the healthier growth mindset alternative. As you do so, remember to be kind, and don't expect perfection; there will always be fixed-mindset forces to contend with. Cultivating a growth mindset is a lifelong task,[3] one you should undertake on behalf of yourself and those who can't help but learn from the way you approach challenge, define success, react to failure, and prioritize learning in your life.

Beliefs of a fixed mindset:

1. My intelligence and other personal qualities are innate and unchangeable.

2. High effort signals a lack of ability. If you have to work hard, you can't be that talented.

3. Challenging tasks threaten my self-image. I can't risk doing things that make me look bad, so I stick to tasks that come easily and win praise.

4. I judge myself based on how I measure up to others. Success is about proving I'm smart, talented, gifted, or special; it's about validating my superior qualities. I rely on the valuations of others for this measurement, and (to a large extent) for my sense of worth.[4]

5. Mistakes reflect poorly on me personally, and will overwrite past successes. Since failure means I lack certain fixed qualities, I have little recourse to cope with or overcome it, and will often blame other people or circumstances (or find other ways to repair my self-

esteem).[5] I would rather withhold effort and preserve an image of superiority than try hard, fail, and expose a lack of ability.[6]

6. Everything is about the outcome. If I can get the outcome I want (or others want from me) with minimal effort, then I will. Afterward, there's no reason to keep working.

Since how I perform now is evidence of how I'll always perform (and how I should feel about myself), I'm desperate for a favorable result in the short-term. It's less important if I forego genuine understanding, if I don't enjoy the process, if I'm not interested or learning anything about myself, if I have to bend the rules or cheat, if I'm cultivating bad habits—as long as I'm "winning" the game (or otherwise preserving an image of superiority).

7. Criticism is a personal indictment of my ability; it arouses resistance and defensiveness. Asking for help is an admission of weakness and hurts my pride.

8. Good friends and partners are those who inflate my self-worth and help hide my deficiencies. I tend to idealize others (as I would have them idealize me). The personal qualities of others are innate and unchangeable. Successful relationships come naturally; if they demand significant work, they weren't meant to be.

9. The achievements of others often make me feel inferior, resentful, or envious. I assume their success was effortless and their natural ability superior to mine. (This contributes to the feeling of being an impostor when I am successful, as I cannot live up to such a standard.) Success is a zero-sum game: if your achievements make you look better, I look worse (and vice versa); this tends to make me adversarial and selfish.[7]

10. Stress is a debilitating experience. It is a signal of my impending failure; if I were more talented or skilled, I wouldn't be stressed. (This makes experiencing stress something that is, itself, stressful.)[8] Stress is something to avoid or fight against.

11. When explaining negative events I use language that's permanent (e.g. "always", "never"), global (projecting effects across many situations), personal (implicating my identity or character), and catastrophic (dwelling on the worst case). The effects of negative events are largely fixed and unaffected by my beliefs and interpretations, so there's little use in changing my self-talk or explanatory style.[9]

12. I know my potential. I know what I'm capable of and what is beyond me. I won't take on new or ambitious projects that are outside my range of ability.

13. The most important and defining influence on my life is the hand I was dealt.

Beliefs of a growth mindset:

1. My intelligence and other personal qualities can be improved.

2. High effort is the way to cultivate ability. Innate talent is just a starting point.

3. Challenging tasks strengthen my self-image. I prefer tasks that require learning new things, even though they may take time and be frustrating. It is struggling with difficult things that makes growth possible.

4. Success is about pushing my limits and developing my abilities. I rely on personal standards of hard work, reliable habits, and incremental growth for my sense of worth. My talents, interests, ambitions, and life circumstances are unique; comparing myself to others is unlikely to help me achieve my authentic potential.[10]

5. Mistakes are problems to be addressed and learned from. Failure isn't a negative result as long as it can help me improve. I try to accurately assess my responsibility for failures, as well as identify factors that are out of my control. If I'm at fault, I can accept it (and still feel good about myself) knowing I can correct my behavior with deliberate effort.[11]

6. Growth over time matters more than any single outcome. (Outcomes are still important as they inform my ongoing efforts.) If I've prepared for a challenge the best I can, and don't let results (good or bad) put an end to my learning, I've done well.

Since where I am now isn't necessarily where I'll end up,[12] I take a long view. It's important that I develop genuine understanding, that I'm interested and cultivating self-knowledge, that I don't violate my integrity, that I'm practicing healthy habits of mind and body. (It's adherence to these values that also influences how I feel about myself.) I would rather continue playing the game, while getting better and enjoying the process, than "win" the game.[13] (The "game" is never really over, anyway.)

7. Criticism is welcome feedback about my current abilities; it arouses my interest and (when given in good faith) my gratitude. If I perform poorly, I'll seek out help in order to improve.

8. Good friends and partners are those who, while accepting my present qualities,[14] challenge me to grow, and help me maintain a realistic self-image. I try not to idealize

others; no one is perfect, and everyone struggles with similar human difficulties at one time or another. This admission reveals possibilities for genuine growth, and improves my sense of compassion and empathy. The personal qualities of others can be improved. Healthy relationships require thoughtful, consistent effort.

9. The achievements of others inspire me and are a resource to learn from. I assume their success was preceded by long, hard work and temporary setbacks. Success is not a zero-sum game; everyone benefits when someone grows and improves their competence; this tends to make me cooperative and generous.

10. Stress is not inherently bad. It's a natural response to challenge that can enhance my focus and performance. I have effective ways of leveraging stress, removing needless stress, and shutting off my stress response when it's no longer helpful.[15] If I avoid stressful situations whenever possible, I will likely miss out on significant opportunities for growth.

11. When explaining negative events I use language that's temporary (e.g. "sometimes", "lately"), specific (limiting effects to the relevant situation), impersonal (implicating my actions not my identity), and realistic (refraining from exaggeration). The effects of negative events have a lot to do with how I interpret them and the actions I take to improve, so I try to catch my impulsive, negative self-talk and make corrections.

12. My potential is largely unknown and unknowable. Who knows what I can achieve with enough time and dedication?[16] I will take on novel projects with the (reasonable) expectation that I'll rise to the challenge and learn along the way.

13. The most important and defining influence on my life is how I play the hand I was dealt.

We all have core beliefs or assumptions about things like intelligence, success, failure, challenge, stress—and education. These beliefs don't necessarily reflect reality as it objectively is. They are simplified frameworks we inherit from our upbringing and culture.

For decades, researchers have studied how these assumptions shape our expectations, explanations, and motivations—how they can limit what we believe we are capable of. Researchers have also studied how we can change these mindsets, how we can begin to question the assumptions that do not serve us and adapt them to improve our lives.

Here are some exercises you can do to help reinforce a growth mindset:

1. First, identify yourself as someone who can implement a growth mindset. Embrace the challenge of improving the way you embrace challenge.

2. Review the beliefs of a fixed mindset above, and think of a time in your life when you held one of these views. Now read the corresponding growth mindset belief and consider how it could have changed your thoughts or actions. Imagine yourself using a growth mindset to achieve a more personal, long-term, genuine success.

3. Consider something you're good at. How much of this ability came naturally and how much was the result of prolonged effort? Were you encouraged by others when you were starting out? When you experienced difficulty, how did you respond?

How much of your identity is tied up with this skill? Do you challenge yourself to improve to the degree you would like? Are there challenges you avoid for fear of losing the label "good"?

4. Consider something you're bad at. Was it something you really applied yourself to, or did you experience an early failure that ended your effort? Were you labeled or judged in a way that discouraged your effort (or convinced you that your low ability was a fixed quality)?

5. Consider how you encourage, support, or affirm others. Do you praise ability in a way that suggests it is innate or fixed, or do you praise effort in a way that encourages growth through challenge? Do you demand outcomes without regard for effort, good habits, healthy character, or genuine improvement?

Do you, through reward and punishment, create environments where looking good is more important than getting better, where the struggle of embracing a challenge can't be risked, where negative results are stigmatized or intolerable?

Are your standards for the success of others based on competition, a sense of externally validated superiority, or are your standards more holistic and personal, appropriate for the authentic, long-term growth of the individual?

6. As you practice a skill, collect and appreciate evidence of your growth over time. (This is also a pillar of effective habit formation.) When you can, quantify your progress, in increments that are neither too small to be meaningful nor too large to provide steady motivation.

And as you begin to recognize fixed mindset beliefs and correct them, acknowledge and celebrate these small achievements.

A growth mindset implies much more than the belief that your personal qualities can improve through effort. The mindset bolsters your character in many meaningful ways.

You face difficulty with the confidence that the struggle itself will make you stronger. You embrace challenges without the fear (or arrogance) that outcomes render some permanent judgment of your ability, potential, or self-worth.

You are kinder to yourself and others when you or they experience negative results. You don't apply constraining labels or attack character; you investigate opportunities to improve actions and thoughts. Because you focus on improving, and don't take outcomes personally, you can hold yourself and others accountable in more honest and helpful ways.

You have more patience, as you value the long-term process over the short-term product. You measure success by *growing* yourself, not *proving* yourself. You have a more reliable foundation for self-worth, using internal standards of substance instead of external standards of appearance.

You claim a greater sense of agency in your life; you are not constrained by the qualities you were born with, or the circumstances of your upbringing. You feel a greater sense of control and self-determination. You can choose what kind of person to be, what constitutes intelligence, success, failure, a good friend, a good education, and a good life.

Footnotes

[1] Many of the ideas in this article (and concerning growth mindset, wherever it's discussed) come from [Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006, Ballantine / Penguin Random House, 2016]

[2] While over the years growth mindset research has shown much smaller effects than initially claimed, I'm not advocating for their specific school interventions aimed at increasing metrics like task persistence, grades, and scores. I believe the principles of a growth mindset and its accompanying beliefs (discussed below) are widely accepted hallmarks of mental health and should be approached

with the aim of general human well-being. A growth mindset isn't a mere tool for improving school outcomes, and using it as such will likely undermine its message and broad potential benefit.

[3] Retraining patterns of thought and emotion takes time and effort (similar to learning a new language or building new muscles). And even then, maintaining these new patterns requires regular practice.

Alain de Botton and Dr. Rangan Chatterjee, "Until You Learn These 3 Life Lessons, Finding Joy & Meaning Is Impossible," *YouTube*, uploaded by Dr Rangan Chatterjee, 20 Nov. 2024, 33:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o9DqUXoFn8

[4]

> *The sixth lesson I teach is provisional self-esteem*. ... I teach that your self-respect should depend on expert opinion. My kids are constantly evaluated and judged.
>
> A monthly report, impressive in its provision, is sent into a student's homes to signal approval or to mark exactly, down to a single percentage point, how dissatisfied with the child a parent should be. ... Although some people might be surprised how little time or reflection goes into making up these mathematical records, the cumulative weight of the objective-seeming documents establishes a profile that compels children to arrive at certain decisions about themselves and their futures based on the casual judgment of strangers. Self-evaluation, the staple of every major philosophical system that ever appeared on the planet, is never considered a factor. [John Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, pp. 9-10]

[5]

> To a certain degree, we all experience feelings of inferiority, since we all find ourselves in situations we wish we could improve. If we have kept our courage, we shall set about ridding ourselves of these inferiority feelings by direct, realistic, and satisfactory means—that of improving the situation. No human being can bear a feeling of inferiority for long; he will be thrown into a state of stress that demands some kind of action. But suppose an individual is discouraged; suppose he cannot imagine that if he makes realistic efforts he will improve his situation. He will still be unable to bear his feelings of inferiority. He will struggle to get rid of them. But the method he tries will not get him any further forward. His goal is still to be superior to difficulties, but instead of overcoming obstacles he will try to persuade, even force himself, into *feeling* superior. Meanwhile, his feelings of inferiority will intensify, because the situation that produces them remains unaltered. Since the root cause is still there, every step he takes will lead him further into self-deception, and all his problems will press upon him with greater and greater urgency. [Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, 1931, Hazelden Foundation, 1998, pp. 40-41]

[6]

> Self-handicapping involves the creation of some impediment to one's performance—either imagined or real—so that the individual has a ready excuse for potential failure. ...

> One of the most universal self-handicapping strategies involves procrastination ... By studying only at the last minute, procrastinators can hardly be blamed for failure—they simply had too much to do, and not enough time. Moreover, if these individuals are successful, a reputation for brilliance will be assured because they will have succeeded with so little effort. Thus, in one sense at least, procrastinators have little to lose and much to gain. ...
>
> A subtle variation on the procrastination theme involves apparently genuine attempts to keep busy, very busy—in fact, too busy but with little effort to show for it. The student who can never get beyond rewriting the introduction to her term paper in an endless succession of polishing and tinkering illustrates the point. So does the behavior of the student who spends endless hours collecting references for his paper so that in the end nothing ever gets written. This illogical use of one's time and resources allows a variety of explanations for eventual failure ... [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 86-87]

[7]

> As a rule, rewards are not conducive to developing and maintaining the positive relationships that promote optimal learning or performance. But two common arrangements for rewarding people take a bad thing and make it much worse by explicitly setting people against each other. The first of these is a condition of artificial scarcity. ...
>
> In this scenario, no matter how well everyone in the class does on each test, only one student is permitted to get the prize. The central message that is taught here—the central message of all competition, in fact—is that everyone else is a potential obstacle to one's own success. If the reward system sets people up as one another's rivals, the predictable result is that each will view the others with suspicion and hostility and, depending on their relative status, perhaps with contempt or envy as well. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 55]

[8] Dr. David Yeager, "How to Master Growth Mindset to Improve Performance," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 15 April 2024, 24:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etEJrznE-c0

[9] Martin Seligman, *The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience*, Houghton Mifflin, 1995, pp. 52-58

[10]

> If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. [Max Ehrmann, *Desiderata: A Poem for a Way of Life*, quoted by William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 177]

[11] [I]t is not so much the event of failure, or even its frequency, that disrupts performance as it is the meaning of failure. For students ... who steadfastly interpret failure as the result of improper or insufficient effort, failure acts as a challenge—a goad to renewed striving. But for others ... who see failure as confirming suspicions of incompetency, failure can only be paralyzing. Likewise, it is now understandable why success does not always reinforce self-confidence ... If individuals believe their victories are the product of factors beyond their control—luck, chance, or the humanitarian impulse of a teacher—then there is little assurance that success can be repeated. This reasoning also accounts for why failure-prone students often prefer to explain their successes, infrequent as they may be, as simply a lucky break. Doing so also releases them from the obligation to repeat their successes, something they are doubtful of doing anyway. ...

One often-heard refrain in the chorus of reform proposals is the suggestion that teachers should arrange classroom learning so that students experience either no failure or as little failure as possible. This view assumes that failure per se causes loss of esteem and self-respect. Quite the contrary, failure can act as a positive force so long as it is properly interpreted by the learner. Rather than focusing on failure as the culprit, educators should arrange learning so that falling short of one's goals, which inevitably happens to everyone, will be interpreted in ways that promote the will to persist. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 64]

Failure is both inevitable and desirable. It is how children learn what works and what doesn't. It helps hone the skills that will be most effective in meeting challenges. ... Let your children know the reality—that mistakes, setbacks, and failures are ways to advance knowledge—and that successful people have always experienced more than their share of failure along the way. A diet of easy success ensures being discouraged at the first whiff of challenge. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 237-238]

[12] Benjamin Bloom, an eminent educational researcher, studied 120 outstanding achievers. They were concert pianists, sculptors, Olympic swimmers, world-class tennis players, mathematicians, and research neurologists. Most were not that remarkable as children and didn't show clear talent before their training began in earnest. Even by early adolescence, you usually couldn't predict their future accomplishment from their current ability. Only their continued motivation and commitment, along with their network of support, took them to the top. [Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006, Ballantine / Penguin Random House, 2016, p. 39]

Be patient, then, and sympathetic with the type of mind that cuts a poor figure in examinations. It may, in the long examination which life sets us, come out in the end in

> better shape than the glib and ready reproducer, its passions being deeper, its purposes more worthy, its combining power less commonplace, and its total mental output consequently more important. [William James, "Talks to Teachers," 1892, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*, Literary Classics of the United States, 1992, p. 793]

[13]

> You might object: I should be winning at everything! But winning at everything might only mean that you're not doing anything new or difficult. You might be winning but you're not growing, and growing might be the most important form of winning. Should victory in the present always take precedence over trajectory across time? [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, p. 88]

> [G]oals create an "either-or" conflict: either you achieve your goal and are successful or you fail and you are a disappointment. You mentally box yourself into a narrow version of happiness. This is misguided. It is unlikely that your actual path through life will match the exact journey you had in mind when you set out. It makes no sense to restrict your satisfaction to one scenario when there are many paths to success.
>
> A systems-first mentality provides the antidote. When you fall in love with the process rather than the product, you don't have to wait to give yourself permission to be happy. You can be satisfied anytime your system is running. And a system can be successful in many different forms, not just the one you first envision. ...
>
> When all of your hard work is focused on a particular goal, what is left to push you forward after you achieve it? This is why many people find themselves reverting to their old habits after accomplishing a goal.
>
> The purpose of setting goals is to win the game. The purpose of building systems is to continue playing the game. True long-term thinking is ... not about any single accomplishment. It is about the cycle of endless refinement and continuous improvement. Ultimately, it is your commitment to the *process* that will determine your *progress*. [James Clear, *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, Avery / Penguin Random House, 2018, pp. 26-27]

[14]

> When a person is able to feel and communicate genuine acceptance of another, he possesses a capacity for being a powerful helping agent for the other. His acceptance of the other, as he is, is an important factor in fostering a relationship in which the other person can grow, develop, make constructive changes, learn to solve problems, move in the direction of psychological health, become more productive and creative, and actualize his fullest potential. It is one of those simple but beautiful paradoxes of life: When a person feels that he is truly accepted by another, as he is, then he is freed to move from there and to begin to think about how he wants to change, how he wants to grow, how he can become different,

> how he might become more of what is capable of being. [Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children*, 1970, Three Rivers / Random House, 2000, p. 38]

[15]

> Stress-Can-Be-Enhancing Messaging: People often mistake their body's stress response for a sign that they're in a situation they can't handle. It's easy to do—racing heart, fast breathing, sweating—these are also ways our bodies respond in emergencies, when we're in real trouble. This is a mistake that actually can cause you to perform worse because, if you think your stress response is a problem, you're more likely to be worried about it and get distracted from performing. ... You can use your body's stress response effectively next time you feel it kicking in while you're trying to perform or master something difficult. When you start to feel anxious, try to remind yourself that this is your body's way of helping you to rise and meet the challenge you're facing. That should help you to spend less time worrying about the fact that you feel anxious. Then you can focus on what you're doing and let your body's stress response give you the extra boost you need. [Yeager et al., "A Synergistic Mindsets Intervention Protects Adolescents from Stress."] quoted in [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 192-193]

Dr. Alia Crum, "Science of Mindsets for Health & Performance," *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew Huberman, 24 Jan. 2022, 55:27, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFR_wFN23ZY

Jill Suttie, "Seven Ways to Have a Healthier Relationship With Stress," *Greater Good Magazine*, 15 Feb. 2023, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_to_have_a_healthier_relationship_with_stress

Elissa Epel, "Here's how you can handle stress like a lion, not a gazelle," *TED*, 9 Feb. 2023, https://ideas.ted.com/heres-how-you-can-handle-stress-like-a-lion-not-a-gazelle/

Kelly McGonigal, "How to make stress your friend," *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 4 Sept. 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU

[16] Growth mindset doesn't say you can achieve anything with effort, just that you don't really know what you're capable of with the right effort and support. (Similarly, just because someone can change, doesn't mean they will change.) It doesn't say where your effort should be applied, or how difficult it will be. We all have a limited amount of time and energy, and must choose those qualities that are most important to work on, while accepting that we will have qualities that remain undeveloped. What is important is that we dedicate ourselves to learning and growing in those directions that are the most meaningful, authentic, and beneficial to us and the world.

Guidelines for General Health

> I lay it down as an educational axiom that in teaching you will come to grief as soon as you forget that your pupils have bodies. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, p. 78]

> It is always important to look for these reciprocal actions of the mind on the body and of the body on the mind, since they are two parts of the whole with which we are concerned. [Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, 1931, Hazelden Foundation, 1998, p. 33]

> Much of the damage we do to our bodies starts early in life with high stress, poor diet, risky behavior, and lack of exercise. When we are young, we often don't feel the effects of the way we mistreat our bodies—but those effects show up later in life. And most people don't realize the problems they are causing themselves in the future. Students should learn how to take much better care of themselves if they want to live a healthy life as adults. [Allan Collins, *What's Worth Teaching?: Rethinking Curriculum in the Age of Technology*, Teachers College, 2017, p. 37]

> Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never-so-little scar. ... Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. [William James, "Talks to Teachers," 1892, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*, Literary Classics of the United States, 1992, pp. 757-758]

> The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken. [Samuel Johnson, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time,* Bantam, 1977, p. 132]

The following are some guidelines for general health, covering four important areas: sleep, diet, exercise, and relaxation. Improving any of these categories can have significant effects on your mood, willpower, immune system, brain function, and appearance. Approach them incrementally; aim to make small improvements however you can.

(These guidelines aren't substitutes for professional medical advice from your doctor. Along with the habits below, it's important to see your doctor regularly and bring up your questions and concerns with them.)

Sleep:

1. Get 8-10 hours of sleep per night (recommended for teenagers). 7-9 hours for adults.[1]

2. Go to bed and wake up at a regular time. (Set a bed-time alarm if you need it.)

3. Create a relaxing bed-time routine. (Prepare for bed an hour before sleep, dim lights, minimize exposure to screens, avoid stress, write in a journal, list the things you want to accomplish the next day, etc.)[2]

4. Try not to spend time in bed awake. (Train your brain to associate the bed with sleep.)

5. Minimize caffeine intake. (Most people should refrain at least 6 hours before bed.)[3]

6. Think of adequate sleep as an investment in your mental and physical health (not as something that's lazy or indulgent). It improves your ability to learn, regulate emotions, prevent illness, and much more.

Diet:

(Note, there is no "perfect" diet for everyone, owing to individual differences in genes and lifestyles. The following, however, are a few basic principles that are commonly recommended by experts.)[4]

1. Drink plenty of water throughout the day (8-11 cups [64-88 ounces] daily for teenagers, 9-13 cups [72-104 oz.] for adults), particularly when you wake up.[5]

2. Eat real food.[6] (Avoid highly processed foods, preservatives, high sugar or sweetener foods, foods with more than five ingredients, hard-to-pronounce ingredients, etc.)

3. Eat mostly plants. (Favor leafy vegetables, colorful (vitamin rich) vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fruits, a variety of plants, fungi, and fermented foods for healthy gut bacteria.)

4. Don't eat too much. (Chew thoroughly,[7] taste mindfully,[8] stop eating before you feel full,[9] eat at leisurely communal meals, eat at a table, minimize snacking, don't eat too late at night.)

5. Improve your relationship with food. Eat when you're hungry instead of when you're bored or stressed, learn to cook and enjoy the process,[10]share meals with friends and family, express gratitude for your food, respect your body and the effect food has on it.[11]

Exercise:

1. Adolescents should get an average of 60 minutes of moderate exercise per day. (e.g. brisk walking, casual sports, biking, house and yard work, etc.) This includes 30 minutes of vigorous exercise at least 3 times per week. (e.g. running, swimming, biking, sports that involve jumping or rapid change in direction, weight lifting, etc.) Exercise routines should include aerobic activity and muscle/bone strengthening activities.[12]

Adults should get a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week, and 30 minutes of vigorous exercise 3 times a week.

A rule of thumb: when doing moderate exercise you can talk, but not sing; when doing vigorous exercise you can't say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

2. Using these recommendations, create a daily/weekly routine that works for you. Make your goals realistic, even if they are small—anything to get you into the habit. (e.g. stretching or walking in the morning, calisthenics/body-weight/free-weight exercises you can do at home (there are many good workout videos online[13]), walking after dinner, etc.)

3. Exercise is an essential human experience, don't let it feel like a chore. Find activities that allow you to engage with life the way that you want to. Make movement enjoyable, whether it's how you get from place to place, connect with friends, bond with a loved one, commune with nature, or develop a sense of mastery. Choose exercise goals that will change the way feel about yourself and what you believe you're capable of.[14]

Exercise is deeply beneficial to your mental health. It can improve your resiliency to stress, connection with other people, and levels of energy, hope, and optimism.

Relaxation:

1. Dedicate some personal time every day to a non-stressful, rejuvenating activity. (e.g. practice an art, craft, or hobby, enjoy nature, listen to calming music, take a hot bath, etc.)

2. Remove needless stress from your life. (e.g. excessive social media use,[15] procrastination, rehashing stressful situations, etc.) Cultivate tools to better control and leverage stress.[16] Change the way you view stress.[17] Some stress is not only unavoidable but beneficial, enhancing performance and resilience in challenging moments. Our attitudes toward stress can significantly impact how it affects our mental and physical health.[18]

3. Practice slow breathing. (softly, through the nose, using the diaphragm, long exhales)[19]

4. Practice mindfulness. This can help you focus, be more fully present, and be more aware of (and less controlled by) your thoughts and feelings.

5. Do relaxing exercise. (e.g. walks with friends, scenic bike rides, yoga, etc.)

6. Express gratitude. This will help you counteract hedonic adaptation (losing happiness from new things over time) and the arrival fallacy (the belief that you will be happy once you get "there"). You can voice gratitude directly to those who deserve it. You can write grateful thoughts in a journal: write just once or twice a week, focus on people, be specific (quality over quantity), note the unexpected or surprising, recall when others have expressed gratitude for you, think about your life without certain things.[20]

Gratitude and mindfulness go hand-in-hand. Because being grateful isn't just a retrospective exercise, it's first and foremost a practice of taking mindful moments to enjoy and appreciate the goodness of the people and things in your life.

Footnotes

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Practicing Mindfulness

> Imagine what our story would look like if, rather than succumbing to the insistent voices of family or culture, we determined that our vocation was to be a better human. Many, if not most of us, will have run through our lives and never really been here, never really experienced precious moments of mindfulness, asked *why*, or felt ourselves in the presence of mystery, whether found in the beloved, in nature, in contemplation, in the work of hands, or in whatever venues mystery comes to find us. [James Hollis, *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*, Gotham / Penguin, 2009, p. 184]

The benefits of a mindfulness practice are personal[1] and can be quite diverse. Here are some reasons why I practice mindfulness meditation, and why I think you should too:[2]

– To be more aware of your experiences in the present, and when you're lost in thoughts of the past or future.
– To recognize automatic behaviors, feelings, and judgments; to think and act more deliberately.
– To be more sensitive to your body and its relation to the mind.
– To take greater care about what you take in (food, drink, sights, sounds, media of all kinds).
– To create moments of peace and composure in the midst of anxiety.
– To cultivate a mentality of self-care and compassion.

Below are some passages that introduce the concept of mindfulness meditation. They can be good reminders of basic principles as you begin your practice.

> Knowing what you are doing while you are doing it is the essence of mindfulness practice. ... This leads directly to new ways of seeing and being in your life because the present moment, whenever it is recognized and honored, reveals a very special, indeed magical power: *it is the only time that any of us ever has*. [Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 1990, Bantam, 2013, p. 16]

> All [mindfulness] involves is cultivating our ability to pay attention in the present moment as we suspend our judging, or at least, as we become aware of how much

> judging is usually going on within us. ... One way to think of this process of transformation is to think of mindfulness as a lens, taking the scattered and reactive energies of your mind and focusing them into a coherent source of energy for living, for problem solving, and for healing.
>
> We routinely and unknowingly waste enormous amounts of energy in reacting automatically and unconsciously to the outside world and to our own inner experiences. Cultivating mindfulness means learning to tap into and focus our own wasted energies. In doing so, we learn to calm down enough to enter and dwell in extended moments of deep well-being and relaxation, of feeling whole and wholly integrated as a person. [Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 1990, Bantam, 2013, p. lx]

> Meditation sounds like a practice; it is something you *do*, something you *add* to your life. In the beginning it certainly seems this way. ... But real meditation isn't something you *do*, it's something you *cease* to do. It is non-distraction. It is the freedom to notice what is already here. ... The question about a good life becomes: What is there to notice, right now, that matters? What's available to your powers of attention, in this moment, that is important—or even sacred? ... There is a freedom to be found here in recognizing what it's like to be you, what life is *actually* like in each moment, rather than what you think it's like, or hope it's like, or fear it's like. Meditation is simply noticing what is real, as a matter of experience. [Sam Harris, "A New Year's Message from Sam (Episode #397)," *YouTube*, uploaded by Sam Harris, 1 Jan. 2025, 10:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itEw0klxBWM]

> With mindfulness, we have the capacity to recognize the habit energy every time it manifests. "Hello, my habit energy. I know you are there!" If we just smile to it, it will lose much of its strength. Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to recognize our habit energy and prevent it from dominating us.
>
> Forgetfulness is the opposite. We drink a cup of tea, but we do not know we are drinking a cup of tea. We sit with the person we love, but we don't know that she is there. We walk, but we are not really walking. We are someplace else, thinking about the past or the future. The horse of our habit energy carrying us along, and we are its captive. We need to stop our horse and reclaim our liberty. We need to shine the light of mindfulness on everything we do, so the darkness of forgetfulness will disappear. [Thich

> Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, 1998, Broadway, 1999, p. 25]

> We are exposed to invasions of all kinds—images, sounds, smells, touch, ideas—and many of these feed the craving, violence, fear, and despair in us. The Buddha advised us to post a sentinel, namely mindfulness, at each of our sense doors to protect ourselves. Use your Buddha eyes to look at each nutriment you are about to ingest. If you see that it is toxic, refuse to look at it, listen to it, taste it, or touch it. Ingest only what you are certain is safe. [Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, 1998, Broadway, 1999, p. 34]

> Do not lose yourself in the past. Do not lose yourself in the future. Do not get caught in your anger, worries, or fears. Come back to the present moment, and touch life deeply. This is mindfulness. [Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, 1998, Broadway, 1999, p. 81]

> If a particular perception has been labeled "good," then we try to freeze time right there. We grab onto that particular thought, fondle it, hold it, and we try to keep it from escaping. When that does not work, we go all-out in an effort to repeat the experience that caused the thought. Let us call this mental habit "grasping."
>
> Over on the other side of the mind lies the box labeled "bad." When we perceive something "bad," we try to push it away. We try to deny it, reject it, and get rid of it any way we can. We fight against our own experience. We run from pieces of ourselves. Let us call this mental habit "rejecting." Between these two reactions lies the "neutral" box. Here we place the experiences that are neither good nor bad. They are tepid, neutral, uninteresting. We pack experience away in the neutral box so that we can ignore it and thus return our attention to where the action is, namely, our endless round of desire and aversion. So this "neutral" category of experience gets robbed of its fair share of our attention. Let us call this mental habit "ignoring." The direct result of all this lunacy is a perpetual treadmill race to nowhere, endlessly pounding after pleasure, endlessly fleeing from pain, and endlessly ignoring 90 percent of our experience. Then we wonder why life tastes so flat. ...
>
> You can learn to control your mind, to step outside of the endless cycle of desire and aversion. You can learn not to want what you want, to recognize desires but not be

> controlled by them. [Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 1991, Wisdom Publications, 2014, pp. 4, 6]

> Mindfulness is nonjudgmental observation. ... One simply takes a balanced interest in things exactly as they are in their natural states. ...
>
> You can't examine something fully if you are busy rejecting its existence. Whatever experience we may be having, mindfulness just accepts it. It is simply another of life's occurrences, just another thing to be aware of. No pride, no shame, nothing personal at stake—what is there is there.
>
> Mindfulness is an impartial watchfulness. It does not take sides. ... There is no clinging to the pleasant, no fleeing from the unpleasant. Mindfulness treats all experiences equally, all thoughts equally, all feelings equally. ...
>
> Mindfulness is present-moment awareness. ...
>
> Mindfulness is awareness of change. It is observing the passing flow of experience. It is watching things as they are changing. It is seeing the birth, growth, and maturity of all phenomena. ...
>
> Mindfulness is the observance of the basic nature of each passing phenomena. It is watching the thing arising and passing away. It is seeing how that thing makes us feel and how we react to it. It is observing how it affects others. In mindfulness, one is an unbiased observer whose sole job is to keep track of the constantly passing show of the universe within. [Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 1991, Wisdom Publications, 2014, pp. 133-136]

> [A]cceptance is the essence of mindfulness. If we want to grow in mindfulness, we must accept what mindfulness finds. It may be boredom, irritation, or fear. It may be weakness, inadequacy, or faults. Whatever it is, that is the way we are. That is what is real. [Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 1991, Wisdom Publications, 2014, p. 148]

> The most important moment in meditation is the instant you leave the cushion. When your practice session is over, you can jump up and drop the whole thing, or you can

> bring those skills with you into the rest of your activities. [Bhante Gunaratana, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, 1991, Wisdom Publications, 2014, p. 152]

> Life itself is the meditation practice. [John Kabat-Zinn, "Where Is This All Going, and What's Love Got to Do With It?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Mind & Life Institute, 25 April 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzgMnn4Redk]

Before you begin your mindfulness practice, remember to use the tools of effective habit formation to help you get started and stay consistent. You can record your experiences in your Knowledge Management System, everything from the resources you learn from to the insights you have as you practice.

As you approach mindfulness meditation, it's important to have a balance of theory and practice. Just as a science course has lectures to cover important information and laboratory periods to experiment, you should both learn about mindfulness, and train yourself to be mindful.

For an introduction to the practice of meditation, listen to this three minute instruction from the book *The Mind Illuminated*.

Here is a similar brief intro (in writing) from Mindful.org.

Here is an introduction to mindfulness and a brief guided meditation from Sam Harris.

These resources present the core of the meditation practice and can sustain a beginner for quite some time.

It's helpful to explore varied sources of theory, as there are many traditions and techniques to draw from. Some sources will better suit your needs and tastes than others.

I've found books to be the most helpful medium, as they often contain the most carefully crafted and thorough explanations of mindfulness and its practice. The following are a few I recommend:

– *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn (Amazon) (pdf preview)

– *Mindfulness in Plain English*, by Bhante Gunaratana (Amazon) (full pdf)

– *The Mind Illuminated*, by John Yates, Matthew Immergut, and Jeremy Graves (Amazon) (YouTube audio)

– *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (Amazon) (full pdf)

– *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn (Amazon) (full pdf)

– *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Making Friends with Your Mind*, by Pema Chodron (Amazon) (full pdf)

There are also plenty of good meditation apps that offer a steady progression of theory and guided practice. Here are a few that I've sampled:

– Happier Meditation

– Waking Up ("How is Waking Up different?")

– UCLA Mindful App

– Plum Village App

Footnotes

[1] > Ultimately the trajectory of healing will be different in its details for each individual. ... The meditation practice, taken on in the spirit of self-exploration and self-inquiry, can transform our capacity to face, embrace, and work with and within the full catastrophe. But to make this transformation a reality in your life requires that you take responsibility for adapting the basic practice so that it becomes yours; so that you "own" it; so that it fits with your life and your needs! [Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 1990, Bantam, 2013, p. 197]

[2] Recommending goals for mindfulness meditation can be misleading. Goals are future destinations, and mindfulness is (among other things) a practice of being more fully where you already are. To approach mindfulness expecting certain results, or regretting that you aren't where you want to be, can be counter-productive. Nevertheless, goals, or reasons to pursue meditation, are necessary. And if you aren't too attached to them, they can provide direction and guidance to your practice.

Optimizing Your Free Time

Though this course is dedicated to the subject of education, my suggestions for using free time aren't confined to "learning activities." Free time should be approached more holistically. The following are some frameworks and tips that can help you make the best use of your time:

1. "The five C's": Consider each of the major aspects of your life, and which of them calls for your attention. For this purpose I recommend the five categories described in Cal Newport's advice for a "deep life":[1]

– Craft (your work, things you produce, creative leisure activities)
– Community (family, friends, neighborhood)
– Constitution (health, fitness)
– Contemplation (philosophy, ethics, spirituality, deep thinking about a life well-lived)
– Celebration (gratitude, presence, enjoyment and appreciation of the world)

Just as a good doctor inquires into various aspects of a patient's life to locate the sources of an issue and recommend treatment, you should examine yourself with the same comprehensive care. Which categories are you neglecting? Which are you over-emphasizing? Which are most relevant to the problems you're facing? Which would most empower you to achieve your goals?

Think of constructive activities that satisfy your needs in each category. Prepare lists of these activities so it's easy to choose one when you have free time. Make engaging in them as frictionless as possible so you don't default to things that are merely close at hand.

Consider how certain behaviors may affect multiple categories. e.g. Developing your community may also further your craft. Working on your constitution may improve interactions among your community. Contemplation may improve the direction of, or motivation for, your work.

Try to make activities span multiple categories. e.g. Let your craft also be a celebration. Share contemplative thoughts with your friends (—while exercising with them).

Schedule activities in advance. Don't limit your notion of "free" time to "unstructured" time. Create structure for yourself and pledge yourself to it freely. Think of these

engagements as commitments to yourself—for your own sake and those who will benefit from your growth.[2]

2. Most of us, I think, would agree with Mortimer Adler's general order of things: that "earning a living and keeping alive must be for the sake of living well."[3]

This then begs the question: What does living well mean to me? What should I do, and what do I need, in order to live well, now and in the future?

Adler thinks that to live well is to have a life filled with as much leisure as possible: things you freely engage in for their own sake, "virtuous activities," "the goods of the soul," that which fulfills your human potential, and allows you to "grow morally, intellectually, and spiritually."[4] The means of work[5] and recreation,[6] Adler says, should be employed only insofar as they further the ends of leisure.[7]

Note that his definition of leisure isn't that which is most common today, meaning mere idleness: freedom from activity or duty. Adler's definition entails the use of that freedom to serve meaningful, noble ends; it is freedom from certain obligatory duties, yes, but also freedom to honor greater duties of your choosing.

What higher duties will you serve when your needs for work and recreation are met?

If you don't have a clear (and, ideally, inspiring) idea of what it means for you to live well, it will be difficult to get the most out of your free time. You'll lack substantial aims to oppose the allure of the trivial or vulgar. You'll be more susceptible to the hollow fantasies of limitless money, pleasure, or status (and the insecurities on which they feed).

To avoid these pitfalls, you should:

– Make clear for yourself the ends for which you will earn a living and keep alive—the ends that will help you reject ignoble aims (often manifested in consumerism, workaholism, and hedonism). Create a list of general and specific leisure activities that satisfy Adler's definition above.

– Aim to make your work qualify as leisure—to make that which you do for money also provide opportunity for fulfillment, growth, or virtue.

– Change your perception of your work in order to take advantage of existing opportunities you may be neglecting. Appreciate in your work every potential for you to live well and help others live well.[8]

– Be able to say when you've worked (and relaxed) enough, so you can attend to the things that make life worth living (which may include improving the lot of those who lack the means to pursue leisure).

A world dominated by work and recreation—where we neglect family, community, nature, our own growth and the growth of others—where so many suffer from a lack of meaning and purpose—this is a world that has lost touch with the preeminence of leisure in human life. If we want societies that honor the highest ends, we should first define and honor these ends for ourselves.

3. Think of free time as *freedom*: freedom that can be cherished or abused; freedom won, in part, by the enlightenment, courage, and toil of countless people before you; freedom you can choose to enlarge for yourself and others in kind.

Free time brings us face to face with the challenge and responsibility of freedom. What will you do, what values will guide you, when the direction of your life falls to you? We should be honest about the fact that the responsibility to make the best use of your freedom is burdensome, so much so that many escape from it, through sheer carelessness or by transferring the choice to someone else.[9] The rationalizations for abdicating this responsibility are many, but they are nonetheless tragic and wasteful.

When considering the constitution of a good eduction, include this purpose: to prepare you to bear the burden of freedom—to present inspiring, comprehensive ways of "living well"; to make clear your responsibilities (in addition to earning a living and keeping alive) to yourself and others; to impart the skills and qualities of character that allow you to uphold the best uses of your freedom.

4. If something is worth doing, it's likely worth doing as your sole focus, fully present. In our world of efficiency cults and attention economies, never before has your focus been so precious, and so vulnerable. Give your attention the respect it deserves; cultivate deep, disciplined focus; don't divide it carelessly; protect it from thieves.

Engage with people and things the quality of which justifies your full presence. Seek experiences of sufficient "nutritional value" to justify thorough digestion, not hasty consumption. The "fear of missing out" often drives the pursuit of quantity over quality, but consider that a rushed, superficial attention misses out on that which is most profound and personal—the meaning and insight earned by uncommon effort—that which makes a genuine and lasting impact. If the object of your attention won't reward such effort, seek out those that will.

5. With the excess of captivating content available, you should have higher standards of selection beyond what simply grabs your attention. When choosing the best use of your time, consciously ask "Is this *in my interests*?" rather than just "Is this interesting?"

The former evaluates things with respect to personal goals or values. "Does this help me progress in the directions I've deemed valuable? Is it relevant to my growth? Is it *good for me*?"

It may be good to spend some time merely browsing (especially if you lack a guiding direction), but this should also be done consciously. If your intent is to wander to find yourself, you can still do so deliberately, without getting lost in sensational diversion.

6. You don't need large blocks of free time to get the most out of it. Free time can be used well in the span of one mindful breathe. A few minutes can be enough to read a couple pages, do a quick exercise, or keep in touch with a friend. Don't overlook small windows of time.

That being said, you shouldn't feel compelled to fill every minute of your day with something "productive." If the result of optimizing your free time is feeling perpetually stressed or burnt out, then it's likely you haven't struck a healthy balance between your various needs (as described above in #1 and 2).

7. Let your experiences (whether work, recreation, or leisure) fuel your creative pursuits. Let everything you do be a potential source of material for your art or craft.[10] Having such a creative outlet allows you to derive essential meaning from the artistic process: paying attention, appreciating something as significant, shaping and adapting it for personal expression, and sharing it with others. To aid this process you can: hone your powers of

perception (as mentioned in #4 above), acknowledge and follow up on moments of inspiration (use a notebook or app to capture and collect your important ideas), regularly practice some form of craft (when in doubt, the craft of writing is always worthwhile and accessible), cultivate a community that can improve and appreciate your creativity.

8. Be mindful of your reactions to your obligatory duties. How you feel about your time that isn't free inevitably impacts how you spend your free time. If you're resentful in light of your compulsory duties, you're more likely to justify indulging in excessive recreation.[11] Even if you're justifiably proud of (or exhausted from) what you've accomplished in your unfree time, you should still enforce healthy limits on the recreation you've earned.

Ask not: How much recreation can I justify? But: How much recreation is conducive to my overall well-being—how much is "enough" for me to return to the things that I find most meaningful and fulfilling?

9. Valuing your time is valuing yourself: "Self-discipline is self-caring. ... If we feel ourselves valuable, then we will feel our time to be valuable, and if we feel our time to be valuable, then we will want to use it well."[12]

No matter your situation, by choosing to use your time well, you declare and promote self-worth. Remind yourself that your time is valuable because you are valuable, as are the many gifts you might bestow upon the world.[13]

10. Make the connection between time, labor, and money. As money is a direct representation of labor and time, using your money wisely is an important way to respect the value of your time. When considering whether to buy something, ask yourself if you would directly trade your time and labor for it; translate the cost of that thing into hours of work. If you're a young person relying on the income of a parent, ask yourself the same thing: Is a desired purchase worth the hours it would take that parent to earn it? Would they be willing (or would you want them) to spend their time working directly for that desired object?

Buying things that don't reflect the true value of your time and labor (or that of others) is one way to find yourself short of time and dissatisfied with your work. Instead, let your

money further your highest aims, those that bring deep and lasting happiness; use your money to increase the time that you have for meaningful leisure activities.

How we spend our time is ultimately a reflection of our values; we'll pursue what we believe will bring us what we want most (be it wealth, social status, pleasure, happiness, meaning, love, creativity, etc.)

Our task is not only to choose sound values, but to order them appropriately, striking and re-striking a balance that serves our changing needs in the present, our future needs, and the needs of those we care for.

If we don't make our values explicit, we're likely to adopt automatically and uncritically those aims that are most culturally prevalent, incentivized by the market, or urged by biology.

Without an inquiry into genuine, proven sources of happiness and well-being, we're unlikely to orient ourselves properly. We'll spend our time pursuing ends that leave us feeling hollow, or that undermine our long term interests and those of others.

Without an acceptance of the timeless wisdom that dissatisfaction is an inevitable part of life, we'll waste our time chasing non-stop happiness—and we'll feel defective when we inevitably fail. We'll escape from, or vilify, the kind of unpleasant experiences that, if accepted, can bring real meaning, peace, and growth. We'll be unable to experience dissatisfaction without it becoming, itself, a cause of suffering.

Without individuals (and a society) that value human well-being above other things (particularly economic dominance), we'll be compelled to engage in increasingly frenzied competition, to the ruin of those factors that yield true happiness. The technologies that ought to return time to us will be used to fill our time in ever-escalating arms races, to outperform those who are willing to sacrifice more and more human well-being.

But we need not fall into these traps.

We can create cultures and economies that de-escalate the arms races (and remove the perverse incentives) that don't have human flourishing as their ultimate aim.[14]

We can make peace with the inevitable dissatisfactions of life, the ever-renewing appetites, the transience of all things, "good" and "bad." We can learn to feel whole in such a way that

we aren't striving to attain states of perfection or permanence that cannot exist. With this feeling of innate wholeness, we can rescue our time from those competitions that only deepen our insecurities.

We can heed the traditional wisdom and contemporary research that advocate the most sound sources of happiness: loving relationships, bonds of fellowship and community, generosity, gratitude, a sense of control over our lives, a healthy body and mind, the natural world, work that produces states of flow and vital engagement, transcendent purposes beyond ourselves, and lastly, a mindful awareness of the feelings these (and all) experiences create.[15]

If we want more time for the things that bring meaning, fulfillment, and genuine happiness, we have to prioritize this time, accommodate it in our cultures and economies, and use it well when we have it. If we don't use our freedom responsibly—if we can't be trusted to do so—we will find it restricted.

If we don't have inspiring aims for our leisure, we'll have no good reason but to abide, or even demand, a life of mere work and play, compulsive earning and conspicuous spending, pleasure divorced from virtue, status divorced from authentic achievement. We'll also be quietly (or not-so-quietly) desperate for something more substantial. Many of our ills, as individuals and societies, are symptoms of this essential deficiency.

We can help to remedy these ills, in simple and complex ways, by using our time well: by prioritizing the right values and aims for our lives; by taking responsibility for the best uses of our freedom; by disciplining our focus; by refusing to consume junk or demand trivial goods; by valuing ourselves and others as beings capable of meaningful contributions to a miraculous world. Spending our time well can be challenging; as challenging as re-evaluating our ultimate goals, our ways of being, the structure of our cultures and institutions. But it can also be easy; as easy as giving our complete attention to a loved one, getting lost in a creative interest, or stopping to admire a flower.

Footnotes

[1] "Core Idea: The Deep Life," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 21 Feb. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oD5e1DRkbiU

[2] The fact that we tend only to schedule the things we must do (and aren't eager for), can condition us to dread anything planned in advance. Schedule things that you look forward to.

[3] *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 105

[4] Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 88-89, 97, 108, 250-252

"The Soul-Crushing Cost of Productivity," *YouTube*, uploaded by The Machiavellians, 14 June 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6BCcCzAL3s

[5] Defined as that which we do to subsist, is extrinsically compensated, and wouldn't be done otherwise.

[6] Defined as that which refreshes us from, or for, work or leisure. Most commonly: simple play, entertainment, or relaxation; physical/mental upkeep (exercise, sleeping, eating, etc.).

[7] Common leisure pursuits are: creative production, acts of love or friendship, conversation or correspondence, reading or writing, communion with nature, charitable activity, political activity, cultivating intelligence, wisdom, morality, or character, etc.

Providing examples for each category is problematic, as an action can fall under different categories depending on how and why it's performed. What one person does for work, another might do for leisure. Something like exercise can be recreation (mere bodily maintenance), leisure (challenging adventure that improves character), or work (how a professional athlete stays competitive). Learning can be work (vocational training or schooling for the sake of extrinsic reward) or leisure (for intrinsic purposes).

Whereas "the five C's" specify the content of actions ("what" is being done), the categories of work, recreation, and leisure are differentiated by the spirit in which an action is performed (the "how" and "why").

[8]

> The curse that has been laid on humanity, in fable and in fact, is, that by the sweat of its brow shall it live. But reason and moral intuition have seen in this curse the foundation for advance. The early Benedictine monks rejoiced in their labours because they conceived themselves as thereby made fellow-workers with Christ.
>
> Stripped of its theological trappings, the essential idea remains, that work should be transfused with intellectual and moral vision and thereby turned into a joy, triumphing over its weariness and its pain. Each of us will re-state this abstract formulation in a more concrete shape in accordance with his private outlook. ... However you phrase it, it remains the sole real hope of toiling humanity; and it is in the hands of technical teachers, and of those who control their spheres of activity, so to mould the nation that daily it may pass to its labours in

> the spirit of the monks of old. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 67-68]

[9]

> [T]he negative side of freedom, the burden which it puts on man, is difficult to realize, especially for those whose heart is with the cause of freedom. ... We fail sufficiently to recognize ... that although man has rid himself from old enemies of freedom, new enemies of a different nature have arisen; enemies which are not essentially external restraints, but internal factors blocking the full realization of the freedom of personality. ... [W]e are fascinated by the growth of freedom from powers *outside* of ourselves and are blinded to the fact of *inner* restraints, compulsions, and fears, which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories freedom has won against its traditional enemies. ... We forget that, although each of the liberties which have been won must be defended with utmost vigor, the problem of freedom is not only a quantitative one, but a qualitative one; that we not only have to preserve and increase the traditional freedom, but that we have to gain a new kind of freedom, one which enables us to realize our own individual self, to have faith in this self and in life. [Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941, Henry Holt & Co., 1994, pp. 104-106]

[10] This is Emerson's advice about the best use of books (which can apply to other modern media as well):

> Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. ... Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. ["The American Scholar," 1837, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Washington Square Press, 1965, pp. 67-68]

[11] Contemplating how to resolve this resentment is likely to be an invaluable use of your free time.

In light of the notion that "wise people are able to balance three responses to situations: adaptation (changing the self to fit the environment), shaping (changing the environment), and selection (choosing to move to a new environment)" [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*], which response, or responses, would help improve your experience of your obligatory duties?

Adaptation: Are you doing what is within your purview to make the best of the things you must do? Have you adequately prepared to fulfill your duties, such that they aren't needlessly stressful and can provide the enjoyment of competence? Do you have a suitable work ethic that reinforces the importance of these duties? Do you take ownership of them and appreciate their positive effects? Are you taking care of your physical and mental health, which colors much of your experience?

Shaping: Are there ways to change the conditions around your duties to better meet your needs? Are there specific problems with the people or systems involved that you could address? Are there others who could help you make these changes?

Selection: Are there viable alternatives to supplement or replace problematic parts of these duties? If essential needs can't be met by adapting to, or shaping, your obligatory duties, are there different environments or duties that can meet these needs?

[12] [M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology Of Love, Traditional Values And Spiritual Growth*, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1978, p. 24]

[13] What do we communicate to young people about their self-worth when we occupy their time with tasks that lack meaning and intrinsic value?

[14] One organization working toward this end is the Center for Humane Technology.

[15] Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 33-35, 87-89, 93, 97-98, 133-134, 219-225

Laurie Santos, "How to Be Happy," *YouTube*, uploaded by Google Zeitgeist, 21 Nov. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NB5vTe_V-I

Essays



What is the responsibility of education?

What does it entail?

In what ways are you liable to be called to account for your learning and teaching? What kind of obligation do you have to bring about your own growth and that of those you influence? How can you help yourself and others honor this responsibility?

This entire course has been an attempt to answer these questions, but here's an outline of some of its key points.

To properly assume the responsibility of education, you[1] should:

1. ... be an active, autonomous student—not merely receiving knowledge, but *seeking* it: searching for what excites you, what gives you a sense of purpose, what will ultimately make you an exemplary human being. As such a student, you must make the deliberate choice to learn and grow—to be responsible for your growth—not to consider it someone else's job to educate you. Knowledge that is freely and actively *chosen* is most likely to have a lasting and meaningful place in your mind. Autonomous exploration is most likely to reveal the educational path that is uniquely suited to fulfill your potential.

2. ... have personal standards of the kind of education that you want—that you think you ought to have—that you think others deserve from you. This definition of education will give you an individual sense of your obligation to learn and teach to the best of your ability. To get by on the standards of others (or no standards at all) is to risk being satisfied with a quality of learning and teaching that doesn't meet your needs and the needs of your world —that leaves you deficient in authentic work, virtuous character, or vital competencies.

3. ... appreciate that you are always learning, and you are always teaching. Every interaction: social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, leaves its mark in ways sometimes small, sometimes large, but always significant. Many of the most influential lessons taught in our homes, schools, work places, and society at large are conveyed through these implicit educational exchanges, which we often disregard. You should appreciate the educational effects of your actions in all spheres of life, and care greatly about what you take in and what others take in from you.

4. … take responsibility for the world and the educational role you play in it. On "Spaceship Earth" no one is a mere passenger, everyone is part of the crew. Everyone has a role to play in the mission of human flourishing. The educational function—the job to provide others (especially young people) with the expectations and support needed for their optimal growth—is not, and never has been, the sole responsibility of certified teachers and schools. It is, and has always been, the unavoidable reality of every individual; we either acknowledge and do right by this responsibility, or we renounce the necessary authority and execute it poorly.

5. … use your free time wisely. When your needs for work and recreation are met,[2] you should dedicate yourself to what makes life worth living—what feeds your soul and enables you to evolve morally, intellectually, and spiritually. This is the role leisure (in the forgotten sense of the word) ought to play in our lives. Free time is a precious gift that many people don't have. This should inspire a gratitude—and a temperance—that urges you to use your freedom to make yourself and the world better: to (among other legitimate leisure pursuits) learn from your vast inheritance of knowledge, and make your own contribution to this legacy so that everyone can live more freely.

6. … appreciate and harness the power of words. Whether you're a poet or a welder, your internal and external worlds are shaped by language. Your ability to think critically, to be a positive influence on others, often depends on the words you have at your disposal. To this end, there's nothing better than reading and writing diligently. You should give your thoughts the attention they deserve, by writing them down and refining them. This will develop your powers of expression, help you discover what you truly think, and generate ideas you never would have had otherwise. You should read widely and deeply. The benefits of reading: the insight, the inspiration, the vision of human potential—of *your* potential—that can be gained from the great minds of the past and present cannot be overstated.

7. … personally address the questions that underlie all education. These questions are so fundamental to your way of life that to leave them to others, or to fail to make your answers explicit, is to risk pursuing (and teaching others to pursue) values and goals that undermine authenticity, engender vice, or impoverish the spirit. Many of these questions are proposed in this course, but here are a few important ones: What should a good education enable you to do, what kind of life should it prepare you for? What standards of success, health, and happiness should you uphold? What kind of environment is most conducive to healthy human growth? You should consider not only the content of a good education, but its mediums, its motivations, and the long-term effects of such on everyone involved. These

topics ought to be the heart of a Great Conversation that reinforces the essential place of learning and teaching in our lives.

I've used the word *potential* several times here, and I'm reluctant to do so without elaborating and offering some examples.

Like many educational incentives, the idea of potential is often invoked in a negative sense: if you fail to fulfill it you should feel guilty, your future will lack opportunity or dignity. What remains unrepresented is a positive concept of potential, and the great benefits of realizing it.[3] Needless to say, one of the essential jobs of a teacher is to offer students an attractive vision of what is possible for them, things they can and ought to aspire to that will stimulate their abilities and virtues.

The aspects of the responsibility of education listed above are some of the worthy aims that are possible for all of us. Below are a few more (among the many) noble aims that are possible through learning and teaching.

You have the potential to:

A. ... know yourself deeply. Your inner world is an immense frontier, waiting to be explored. The more of this land you survey, the more of its language you can interpret, the more of its uncivilized regions you tame—the more rich your life will be. You have the potential to develop essential habits of self-reflection and self-expression (through various mediums or art-forms). You can discover formative values and personal affinities as you study the works of others.[4] Through such pursuits you can earn the self-knowledge and self-esteem that support a vital integrity—a defense against incursions of various kinds: diversions that would alienate you from yourself,[5] degrading treatment that would reduce you to mere appearances,[6] or demagogues who would exploit your unexamined insecurities.[7]

B. ... develop mastery. Few things are as rewarding as immersion in a challenging task that uses knowledge you've cultivated through sustained effort. The pursuit of mastery grants access to even deeper interests, insights, and an invaluable sense of pride and identity (to say nothing of the economic opportunity afforded by the skills you develop). Mastery facilitates deep knowledge, but it also *broadens* interests as it dissolves the illusion of the separation of subjects. Becoming good at something you care about expands your ability to care about, and become good at, adjacent (or even not-so-adjacent) things. It yields a

genuine authority that supersedes more contrived, coercive means of influencing others. It grants entrance into a community of like minds (both living and dead) who share your values and can support your further growth.

C. ... be a beneficial presence in the lives of others. You can do an immense amount of good by cultivating virtue and demonstrating it to those around you (i.e. honesty, intelligence, self-control, courage, etc.). You can help others by making the human condition, and the requirements for its flourishing, central to your ongoing learning. You can learn to listen to, understand, and address the needs of yourself and others. You can develop the communication skills and psychological awareness that facilitate healthy, loving relationships. You can cultivate the compassion and solidarity that allow you to treat people as parts of the human family to which we all belong.

D. ... be a mentor. Regardless of your age, there are always people less experienced than you who could benefit from your guidance. Some of the most life-changing relationships are those in which someone older takes a chance on someone younger, cares for them, has faith in their potential, and gives them opportunities to grow. Taking such a personal interest in someone demonstrates a respect and a trust that helps that person respect and trust themselves. Mentors have empathy for those who are less experienced, they remember themselves at that stage and ask what kind of guidance they wish they had. The more of us who embrace the potential for mentorship—who seek to elevate those below us—the more humane our cultures will be, and the more healthy the relationship between the old and the young. The more experience, virtue, and authority you cultivate, the better able you will be to fulfill this transformative potential.

One of the greatest benefits of responsible learning and teaching is the effect is has on the potential of others. The more of your own potential you realize, the more you sanction those around you to do the same. The person you become, and the environments you shape, can make possible a deeper, fuller human experience for others, that may not have been possible for them. The responsibility of education entails this dual obligation: to enlarge and realize your own potential, insofar as you are able, and to empower those whose potential you help shape.

To a certain degree, you are responsible for your education—for your choice to learn and grow. At the same time, part of your educational potential is determined by the growth (or lack thereof) of the people around and before you.[8] Insofar as your fate has been

predetermined, you should appreciate that, in a similar way, your educational attainments can (and sometimes *must*) play a part in determining the fate of others. Through your own education you can increase the degree to which others are predisposed to claim responsibility for their own.

This is a monumental potential, the seriousness of which was articulated by Alfred North Whitehead:

> When one considers in its length and in its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage. ...
>
> We can be content with no less than the old summary of educational ideal which has been current at any time from the dawn of our civilization. The essence of education is that it be religious.
>
> Pray, what is religious education?
>
> A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity. [*The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 22-23]

Your potential control over the course of events is unavoidable. This endows you with a certain duty: to learn and teach the knowledge that can "change the issue" of your life and the lives of those you affect. The enduring consequences of your actions make it essential that you uphold, and inspire others to uphold, a faithful devotion to this duty.

If you are to know what this decisive knowledge is, if you are to have the motivation to seek it, then you must be grounded in the present. Not a blinkered, superficial present, but one that you appreciate wholly, as the cumulative sum of the past, the foundation of the future, and the only time you will ever have. Your education should integrate a profound respect for all three. It should help you explore as fully as possible this all-encompassing time that you have to live. And it should initiate you into an adventure that neither defers, nor

curtails, a life of purpose and meaning, for yourself and those to come.

Footnotes

[1] As I speak of the responsibility of education, I'm addressing adults and young people on the road to adult learning (i.e. learning that is uncoerced, autonomous, intrinsically motivated).

Adulthood isn't a switch flipped at a certain age. It's a host of skills, mindsets, and practices that must be gradually developed over a long time. Exposure to these things ought to begin, in ways commensurate with the maturity of the individual, before the "age of adulthood" is reached. It's the responsibility of the educator (i.e. everyone) first to accumulate standards of healthy adulthood through their own education, then to adapt and offer these expectations to the adult-in-training, with sufficient support to meet them.

[2] With much of our culture intent on convincing us that we can never have enough money, status, or pleasure, it's difficult to keep work and play within limits that allow for meaningful, fulfilling leisure. We each must define and enforce the limits that we feel are right for us if we are to have the time to fulfill our responsibilities as students, teachers, family members, citizens, and humans.

[3] Not to mention, a reasonable causal chain linking the task one proposes to this vision.

[4] I don't want to give the impression that self-knowledge is gained solely through introspection or intellectual effort. Self-revelation often occurs best at the confluence of introspection and autonomous experiences in the real world: meeting people, exploring interests and curiosities, challenging yourself to grow.

[5]

> I have concluded that the whole misfortune of men comes from a single thing, and that is their inability to remain at rest in a room. ...
>
> The only thing which consoles us for our miseries is diversion, and yet it is the greatest of our miseries. For that is what prevents us principally from thinking about ourselves, and which, without our being aware of it, brings about our ruin. Were it not for that, we should be plunged in boredom, and that boredom would drive us to seek a more solid means of emerging from it. But diversion amuses us, and permits us insensibly to reach the end of life's journey. [Blaise Pascal, *Selections from The Thoughts*, 1669, translated and edited by Arthur H. Beattie, Harlan Davidson, 1965, pp. 34, 41]

[6]

> Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work. It means that you do not treat your body as a commodity with

which to purchase superficial intimacy or economic security; for our bodies to be treated as objects, our minds are in mortal danger. It means insisting that those to whom you give your friendship and love are able to respect your mind. It means being able to say, with Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre: "I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all the extraneous delights should be withheld or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give." [Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education," speech delivered at Douglass College convocation, 1977, https://www.yorku.ca/cvandaal/files/ClaimingAnEducation.pdf]

[7] Why do we not have leadership that says to us, respectfully and candidly, that the problems we face, at home and abroad, are complex, that no choice is without its costs, and that patience, humility, dialogue, and a larger grasp of complexity will be required of all of us? Are we so immature that we need someone to protect us from ourselves, to lie to us, to collude with our lack of intellectual discipline, our difficulty in handling complexity, our immaturity? Why do we not have more theologians, or preachers, who confirm that life involves suffering, and that our deepest questions will never be answered? Why do we have psychologists in the media who conveniently fail to verify the contradictions with which we all daily live, the necessary suffering that is a by-product of real life, rather than suggest that three easy steps will bring us happiness and material affluence? Until we grow up and step into the large challenge of living our journey as individuals and as a society, we will get the demagogic leaders and the infantilizing culture we deserve. These external artifacts reflect what we have not addressed within. [James Hollis, *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*, Gotham / Penguin, 2009, pp. 70-1]

[8] Being the product of conditioning and being free to change do not war with each other. Both are true. They coexist, grow together in an upward spiral, and the growth of one furthers the growth of the other. The more cogently we prove ourselves to have been shaped by causes, the more opportunities we create for changing. The more we change, the more possible it becomes to see how determined we were in that which we have just ceased to be. ...

We must affirm freedom and responsibility without denying that we are the product of circumstance, and must affirm that we are the product of circumstance without denying that we have the freedom to transcend that causality to become something which could not even have been previsioned from the circumstances which shaped us." [Allen Wheelis, *How People Change*, Harper & Row, 1973, pp. 86-88]

Education Without Romance

What we learn when learning isn't attractive

Most learning strategies deal with deliberate practice: pushing ourselves in order to store new information or improve a skill. This learning is explicit, measurable, and challenging. It's contrasted with the type of implicit, inconspicuous lessons we're constantly learning, particularly from those with whom we identify, or from firsthand experience in meaningful activities.[1]

Both types of learning are indispensable. Some knowledge can't be acquired without disciplined study, and some things we can't help but passively absorb from the influential people and environments in our lives. Schools are almost wholly concerned with explicit study, but this doesn't stop the implicit teaching and learning that goes on there. Through years of academic work, we assimilate enduring messages about our identity, ability, and potential. We also absorb unconscious ideas about what education is and ought to be—its purpose, its place in our lives and society, and our responsibility for it.

Even as a form of explicit learning, deliberate practice is but one phase in the educational process. Alfred North Whitehead called this "the rhythmic stages of education," consisting of romance (attraction), precision (deliberate practice), and generalization (application).[2]

The stage of romance is when students acquire the interest that will sustain them through the challenging work to come. This stage answers the "Why?" question of studying. It's the preparation for learning that makes knowledge personal, meaningful, and durable. It's the essence of the kind of maturing activities that prepare a young person to profit more fully from their studies. These activities often include "independent browsing amid firsthand experiences, involving adventures of thought and of action."[3]

In other words, the stage of romance is that of intrinsic motivation, whether instilled by an inspiring teacher, or through autonomous discovery. In school settings this stage is also the least practiced of the three. It's easily dispensed with in lieu of coercion or extrinsic incentives. You needn't even pose the question of "Why?" when all parties operate automatically under the inevitable answer: "... because I have to."

We've been "getting away" with this for a long time, so one might presume the stage of romance is dispensable. But we pay a considerable price for its omission.

This is most evident in the undue difficulty of and resistance to education's second stage, that of precision—a difficulty that many assume is unavoidable (perhaps due to deficiencies in the student) and unrelated to the absence of the foundational first stage.

As Whitehead put it, "[I]f the stage of romance has been properly managed, the discipline of the second stage is much less apparent, ... [students] know how to go about their work, want to make a good job of it, and can be safely trusted with the details."[4] In other words, young people who are properly attracted to a thing require less coaxing and imposed discipline from adults.[5] Or to paraphrase John Holt, when you rely on coercion or extrinsic incentives you end up diverting significant energy away from inspired teaching and learning in order to combat apathy, evasive tactics, and behavioral problems.[6]

Deliberate practice without intrinsic motivation also makes for inert knowledge—Whitehead's bane of education.[7] The first and third phases of learning are intertwined, as the practical use of a thing is a large part of what makes it attractive. But in many cases no real application can be foreseen, so little initiative is awoken, and knowledge becomes inert the moment a student hands in the final exam.

Now, there is something to be said for coming to terms with necessary but unattractive work.[8] But we ought to ask why a dull task is necessary. Is it inherently useful, essential to our long term goals; or is it necessary because we're under the threat of punishment, forbidden alternatives, compelled by unnatural forces? Does the task follow logically from our freely chosen aims, or is it contrived from aims imposed on us against our will? Clearly, the tasks of education should fall under the former category, especially if that education is to prepare us for authentic, fulfilling careers (and lives), and teach us that effortful learning —even when tedious—is worthwhile enough to continue on our own throughout adulthood.

Here we must return to the importance of implicit learning. What do we glean from our years of deliberate study without interest or application? How does this unnatural, truncated educational process shape our conception of "school things": reading, writing, and intellectual work in general? There are many of these hidden lessons, but foremost among them is the acquired distaste for intellectual pursuits. We learn that education is "boring, difficult, and irrelevant to our lives"[9]—useful only for its signaling value. We associate learning with the control and judgments of school, and we flee from it at the first whiff of freedom. In short, we learn the lessons that are least likely to prepare us to assume the responsibility of education as adults.

Not only do we learn that education is unattractive, we learn to disregard what attractive qualities there might be. We take monumental works of literature, inspiring scientific discoveries, etc. and we force them on students in high-stakes, risk-averse environments where extrinsic incentives all but eclipse any intrinsic value. There is certainly potential for romance in much of the content schools offer, but the medium renders it inert. And it takes a talented, rebellious teacher or a self-assured, undaunted student to salvage the value that may exist.

Why does our medium of education leave so little room for romance? Simply put, we've replaced the force of attraction with compulsion.

[Before I go on to discuss freedom in education I must add a qualifier that ought to go without saying: The freedom of which I speak does not mean isolation, neglect, or permissiveness,[10] it means freedom in association with wise, caring adults—adults who offer young people quality resources to improve their autonomous choices, adults who exemplify autonomous learning, who can help young people define and pursue personal learning goals.

Most of us haven't experienced this, so we assume there are only two ways of interacting with young people: making decisions for them or leaving them alone, without guidance.[11] But there is another way. It's more difficult and nuanced, but it's the best way to help young people achieve autonomy and make the transition to responsible adult learning.]

When students have no choice, education doesn't need to be attractive, and it likely won't be. Without this freedom, it's hard for a student to truly bring themselves to the act of learning. Without it, adults can get by with inferior content and illegitimate authority. Unfortunately, in most learning environments, this freedom doesn't exist. For freedom in education (as in all cases) comes with some risk.[12] A free student may not be attracted to what is offered. (A problem, perhaps, with the offering, not the student.) But with proper guidance a free student may not only choose what adults want them to and learn more effectively, they may, through their negotiations and appeals to reason, learn the critical standards (and personal affinities) that allow them to direct themselves when adult guidance is absent.

It is improving this skill of making wise choices for oneself (i.e. self-governance) that is a central justification for offering freedom—and for honoring the role of attraction—in education.[13] This skill is so important that it justifies the acceptance of some discomfort on the part of adults, as young people practice autonomous decision making, find their

way, and grow at their own pace. It justifies a degree of trust and faith in young people that they can govern themselves (in age-appropriate undertakings); an initial trust that is likely to fulfill itself if given, just as our mistrust is likely to fulfill itself. And it demands a degree of trust in ourselves as adults—trust in the genuine benefit of our offerings, and in our ability to advocate for them, both explicitly and implicitly.

Freedom in education not only allows for practice in self-governance, it also encourages self-definition. When we learn freely, we tend to be attracted to what is personally useful, interesting, or stimulating of our talents—things for which hard work comes more easily, things that earn a lasting place in our memory. It is this authentic learning that is truly additive, and forms a solid foundation of competence and identity.

How can we bring romance back to education? Perhaps the simplest way[14] to make learning more attractive is to make the "Why?"[15] question central to the educational encounter. "Why is this particular assignment valuable—even inspiring? Why is it the best use of our time? Why is knowledge of this broader subject useful?" And sometimes it's just as important to take a step back and remind students of a larger purpose: "Why are we even here? What are the larger goals of education we're pursuing?"

In other words, treat young people as purposeful beings, in need of not just information, but *useful*[16] information, and sensible *reasons*[17] why. Even in coercive environments, interactions can be made more voluntary if arguments for intrinsic value can be made convincingly: if teachers teach what they love, if they convey the virtues of their material, if they embed it in the context of meaningful narratives[18]—if they demonstrate through these efforts a respect for the growing autonomy and rationality of students.[19] Teachers have a responsibility (even more so if they presume to compel attendance) to ensure their material serves students' needs. And as students mature, they have a *need* to play a larger role in the establishment of learning objectives.[20] They have a *need* to discuss and understand what makes worthy educational pursuits so they can learn to be attracted to the right things, both during and after their formal schooling.

What do we learn when learning is attractive? We learn to consider the real value of educational material, based on our own aims and those championed by teachers who must *earn* our attendance. We learn to appreciate genuine authority, derived from mastery, an affection for meaningful content, and a respect for the reality of the educational encounter. When guiding adults trust us with self-governance, we learn to listen to the voice inside us that gives us direction, to subject that voice to increasingly rational debate, and to develop

self-trust. We learn that the potential benefits of freedom *are* worth the risk, and we learn that authentic growth at a personal pace is more important than spurious, short-term signaling.

When we're free to follow the force of attraction, we can experience real romance in education. We can experience "adventures of thought and action", discoveries that are uniquely our own, and communion with the minds of others, unadulterated by extrinsic motives. When we're free to follow the force of attraction, we're able to realize that we are also free to *not* learn—that if we want to grow and achieve our ambitions we'll have to take responsibility for our learning. And perhaps we'll realize that no one else can simply *give* us the education that will fulfill our potential—we must bring ourselves to it.

Footnotes

[1] > Just about all the important knowledge we have about our personal worlds, and the skills we have developed to navigate through these worlds, are a direct result of learning in [this] way. [Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Teachers College, 1998, pp. 3-5]

[2] [*The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 27-30]

[3] [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 52-53]

[4] [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 54-55]

[5] It's not only the content itself that determines attractiveness, but the qualities of the person offering it:

> Being-authority is grounded not only in the individual's competence to fulfill certain social functions, but equally so in the very essence of a personality that has achieved a high degree of growth and integration. Such persons radiate authority and do not have to give orders, threaten, bribe. They are highly developed individuals who demonstrate by what they are—and not mainly by what they do or say—what human beings can be. The great Masters of Living were such authorities, and to a lesser degree of perfection, such individuals may be found on all educational levels and in the most diverse cultures. (The problem of education hinges on this point. If parents were more developed themselves and rested in their own center, the opposition between authoritarian and laissez-faire education would hardly exist. Needing this being-authority, the

> child reacts to it with great eagerness; on the other hand, the child rebels against pressure or neglect or "overfeeding" by people who show by their own behavior that they themselves have not made the effort they expect from the growing child.) [Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, 1976, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 33]

[6] [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 77]

[7]

> In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call "inert ideas"—that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. ...
>
> [T]heoretical ideas should always find important applications within the pupil's curriculum. This is not an easy doctrine to apply, but a very hard one. It contains within itself the problem of keeping knowledge alive, of preventing it from becoming inert, which is the central problem of all education. ...
>
> I appeal to you, as practical teachers. With good discipline, it is always possible to pump into the minds of a class a certain quantity of inert knowledge. You take a textbook and make them learn it. So far, so good. The child then knows how to solve a quadratic equation. But what is the point of teaching a child to solve a quadratic equation? There is a traditional answer to this question. It runs thus: The mind is an instrument, you first sharpen it, and then use it; the acquisition of the power of solving a quadratic equation is part of the process of sharpening the mind. Now there is just enough truth in this answer to have made it live through the ages. But for all its half-truth, it embodies a radical error which bids fair to stifle the genius of the modern world. ...
>
> [W]hatever its weight of authority, whatever the high approval which it can quote, I have no hesitation in denouncing it as one of the most fatal, erroneous, and dangerous conceptions ever introduced into the theory of education. The mind is never passive; it is a perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life until you have sharpened it. Whatever interest attaches to your subject-matter must be evoked here and now; whatever powers you are strengthening in the pupil, must be exercised here and now; whatever possibilities of mental life your teaching should impart, must be exhibited here and now. That is the golden rule of education, and a very difficult rule to follow. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 1-9]

[8]

> Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned, and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson

> that he learns thoroughly. [Thomas Huxley] quoted in [*Barnes & Noble Book of Quotations*, edited by Robert I. Fitzhenry, HarperCollins, 1987, pp. 110-114]

> When all has been said in the way of caution, there is such a thing as pushing on, of getting to know the fundamental details ... and of acquiring an easy mastery of technique. There is no getting away from the fact that things have been found out, and that to be effective in the modern world you must have a store of definite acquirement of the best practice. ...
>
> During the stage of precision, romance is the background. The stage is dominated by the inescapable fact that there are right ways and wrong ways, and definite truths to be known. But romance is not dead, and it is the art of teaching to foster it amidst definite application to appointed task. ... But yet—so many are the delicate points to be considered in education—it is necessary in life to have acquired the habit of cheerfully undertaking imposed tasks. The conditions can be satisfied if the tasks correspond to the natural cravings of the pupil at his stage of progress, if they keep his powers at full stretch, and if they attain an obviously sensible result, and if reasonable freedom is allowed in the mode of execution. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 52-55]

[9] [Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Teachers College, 1998, p. 10]

[10] > "Increasing autonomy" does not have to be a story of increasing aloneness. "Deciding for myself" does not have to equal "deciding by myself." [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 221-222]

[11] Though we should appreciate young people's growing need for autonomy, there will still be times when they benefit from external control and decisions that are made for them. Education (and the development of a young person, more generally) is too complex to be "solved" by adherence to any immoderate rule. (This is another reason why students require individual attention, so that adults can determine when certain principles apply and when they don't.) The long road to self-government requires judicious support from adults over many years.

See also: How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn?

What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?

[12] This risk becomes more intolerable the greater the pressure (on parents and students) to keep on a mandated track, at a mandated pace or be left behind and stigmatized. Similarly, the likelihood of freedom paying off is reduced the less wisdom and caring guidance there is in the environment. If our environment exemplifies unwise choices we can't blame young people for making similar choices

given more freedom. In this case the correct action may not be to restrict young people's freedom but to improve our example and the lessons our environments teach.

[13] This is also the skill that young people will one day employ to make the wisest choices for their children (or other young people under their care). One of the best preparations for this is experience with autonomy-supportive adults when we are young.

[14] Though discussing the value of an assignment may reveal some attractive qualities to students, the ideal would be to alter the curriculum such that the question of "Why?" goes without saying. Assignments that have proven to be implicitly attractive are real-world projects that make meaningful contributions to the community—tasks that serve a deeper purpose, and fulfill a young person's needs for competence, self-regard, and prestige. This kind of educational model is championed by Expeditionary Learning Schools, where learning is made attractive by offering purposeful, significant work. These projects communicate to young people: "*Your skills, your energy, your talents, your contributions are all essential. They matter.*" [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, p. 212]

> "It's not about *interest*, it's about *meaning*," [Ron] Berger [one of the architects of Expeditionary Learning] told me. He thinks curriculum designers are far too reliant on short-term interest, and long-term delay of gratification as ways to motivate kids. Neither is quite right, in Berger's view. "As a society we often say, 'Study now, get a good job later.' We're telling fifty million kids in the U.S. every year to wait for the second marshmallow." Berger thinks that it's far more effective to give young people meaning and purpose *right now* by asking them to learn skills to achieve something that has a direct impact on the community and on their social reputations. ...
>
> Berger explains: "If you tell kids to study World War II history because it's important to their lives someday, or because it's on a test, the kids who are people pleasers will do it, but the kids who don't care will say, *No way*. However, if you tell the kids that they're going to interview a WWII veteran in three weeks, and this person has never been interviewed before, and you'll be able to honor them by being the first to uncover their stories, then there is an incredible pressure to learn —and the threat of an awful shame if you fail to honor the veteran because you were unprepared. That's powerful. Kids will read and read, they'll ask for feedback, they'll work in groups, they'll do the grueling work, not because it's interesting, but because it's meaningful. It's immediate gratification, but for a sense of self-respect and accomplishment, not candy or points." [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 210-211]

Ron Berger's insistence on meaningful skills and purpose *right now*, and on the direct impact of lessons, mirrors Whitehead's insistence on keeping knowledge fresh and his "golden rule of education," as referenced in the above footnote [7].

[15]

> In essence, motivation consists of pointing to the concretes in reality that the child will be dealing with and showing him how he can deal with them better if he learns what you are teaching. That is the only way you can anchor a whole subject from the outset. You make every subject part of the skill of dealing with reality, as against "I just learned this stuff because someone told me to." Learning the latter way is a guarantee of having the subject float in the child's mind, however well it is taught, and however many eloquent examples the teacher gives, because the whole subject, if unmotivated, is disconnected from his life in reality. ...
>
> The principle of motivation is this: show them that the skills they themselves want to have or might want to have depend on mastering this subject. The "might want" is critical. There are many things they do not necessarily want now but they might want some day. ...
>
> I want to stress that motivation is not simply something you provide at the first class or the opening discussion. It must be continuous. You have to persistently refer back to your motivation throughout the entire subject matter." [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, pp. 17, 20]

[16] There will almost always be valid arguments for the "usefulness" of any knowledge. What should concern us is the actual, foreseeable usefulness for a particular individual, relative to all the other knowledge that is likely to be useful to them.

Knowledge that's useful to one student may not be useful to another. As students mature and differentiate themselves they'll choose directions that render some things more useful than others. If we want students to integrate the knowledge that's most useful for their individual growth, they should be free to pursue the most relevant subjects, and to refuse knowledge that doesn't serve them (and, of course, they should benefit from the guidance of adults when making these choices).

Some knowledge is genuinely useful to everyone. If so, a teacher should be able to present it in such a way that students take it on voluntarily. If knowledge is useful and attractive, and a student still refuses it, we shouldn't assume they will *never* acquire it. (Similarly, we shouldn't assume that if this knowledge is forced on a student it will be *retained* long after.) The strict, uniform pace of our education pressures us to force learning in a way that not only makes it less likely to stick, but makes it unattractive such that a student is less likely to come around to it in their own time. (Another one of our self-fulfilling prophecies.)

[17]

> [T]o become a different person because of something you have learned—to appropriate an insight, a concept, a vision, so that your world is altered—that is a different matter. For that to happen, you need a reason. ...

> A reason, as I use the word here, is different from a motivation. Within the context of schooling, motivation refers to a temporary psychic event in which curiosity is aroused and attention is focused. I do not mean to disparage it. But it must not be confused with a reason for being in a classroom, for listening to a teacher, for taking an examination, for doing homework, for putting up with school even if you are not motivated. ...
>
> There was a time when educators became famous for providing reasons for learning; now they become famous for inventing a method. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 3-4, 26-27]

[18]

> Our genius lies in our capacity to make meaning through the creation of narratives that give point to our labors, exalt our history, elucidate the present, and give direction to our future. ...
>
> [W]e are unceasing in creating histories and futures for ourselves through the medium of narrative. Without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 7]

[19] This kind of effort would be more likely were classrooms free of coerced students who are inclined to dismiss, insult, or otherwise discourage a teacher's enthusiasm and noble ideals.

[20]

> [Johnmarshall] Reeve [a researcher studying educational psychology] suspected students' motivation was directly related to whether their core needs were met, including the need for some autonomy and the ability to ask questions and assert their interest. ...
>
> Students [who received autonomy-supportive teaching] were more motivated and engaged. They were happier (increased positive self-concept and increased positive emotions and well-being). They were kinder (increased prosocial behavior and less problematic relationships). They achieved more (increased learning, skill development, and school achievement). [Reeve et al., "Enhancing Students' Engagement by Increasing Teachers' Autonomy Support."] ... Students knew that their teachers cared about their interests, that their opinions mattered, and that they had choice in how they learned. ... They were not pawns in their learning but authors of it. ...
>
> Having some autonomy to make choices, students begin to ask themselves key questions like "What assignment do I want to do? " And when a teachers asks, "What did you like about the assignment?" it's a signal of respect but also an inquiry into interests.
>
> The act of answering these questions builds decision-making abilities ... The autonomy that allows the questions in the first place elicits motivation and energy. ... Students can take ownership because there is a choice, can set goals because they have a say, and can seek and

> overcome a challenge because it's worthwhile—it's their goal, too. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 116-119]

For more on the needs of young people for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, see this link for Self-Determination Theory in education.

For more on the methods of Autonomy-Supportive Teaching, see this paper by Johnmarshall Reeve and Sung Hyeon Cheon.

Results vs. Systems

When outcomes are all that matter, your work habits (and nearly everything else) will be left to you.

> We think we need to change our results, but the results are not the problem. What we really need to change are the systems that cause those results. When you solve problems at the results level, you only solve them temporarily. In order to improve for good, you need to solve problems at the systems level. [James Clear, *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, 2018, p. 25]

Problems in education are often addressed at the level of results. Grades and test scores are demanded with little regard for how they're achieved, how temporary the effects are, or what habits do or don't develop along the way. Solving problems at the systems level, however, involves a student's habits, environment, mindset, and identity. If we want to "improve for good," we should explore the effects of results-based environments and, considering their limitations,[1] ask what systems-level responsibilities fall to students and parents.

Results-based environments implicitly teach a fixed mindset. When people don't address the importance of habits, how consistent effort leads to growth over time, or the tools students can use to make these small improvements, they communicate that these things aren't important. They send the message: "You either have the talent and motivation to succeed, or you don't." This mindset makes it a matter of pride to "get results" with the least amount of effort—the least healthy habits; it's proof that you're "smart." These "smart" students don't develop the learning systems they need to transcend their inborn capacities or accomplish more demanding academic work. Neither do those students who, for various reasons, find schoolwork difficult and therefore figure: "I don't have what it takes, so why even try?"

This focus on outcomes also distorts the meaning and function of tests. In school, we learn that a test is an end, the culmination of learning, instead of a *means* of learning. Testing ourselves regularly and associating the challenge of recall with positive progress should be an important part of our learning habits. But we've been conditioned to fear and avoid tests and the challenge they pose. We associate the struggle of recall with stressful, inflated judgments, often the only reward for which is permission to move on and jettison what

we've "learned." We don't use tests as learning tools, as feedback to inform our ongoing studies. We treat test results as final products, the extrinsic weight of which is often our sole, fleeting motivation.

In addition to these effects, results-based environments teach students to: choose easier tasks, rely on external evaluations and extrinsic incentives, discount intrinsically attractive pursuits, and retain and comprehend material less effectively in the long term.[2]

It's no wonder many of us find it hard to work autonomously, without an imposed structure or extrinsic motivation. Granted, this kind of work has a degree of unavoidable difficulty, but I believe our efforts are hindered most by this fact: Our work has been externally governed so completely and for so long that we lack the systems to govern it ourselves. The habits and skills that would allow us to do self-directed work have been neglected and undermined. And significant environmental influences on these habits have been disregarded.

Of all our educational concerns, these may be the most important and overlooked: Will you be prepared to do the work you genuinely *want* to do, that which will actualize your potential, that which the world needs most from you? Will you have the tools to make slow, difficult progress toward lofty, personal goals? Will you have built an environment that empowers you, or one that distracts you? Will you see yourself and your aspirations as worthy of serious dedication? Will you give yourself permission to think and work with professional intent?

Others are unlikely to ask these questions on your behalf, particularly when they're pressured to focus on narrow metrics with limited time. Your work ethic and study habits —your search for vocation and purpose[3]—will be left to you. You might be able to get by with a good grade, with minimal effort, at the last minute. This may meet the standards of others and achieve your prescribed goals—it may even earn you some praise.

But this is a poor way to discover what you're really capable of. And it's poor preparation for the discipline required to build the life you want. Whether you're struggling in school, getting by, or getting straight A's, you should ask yourself: What kind of habits am I reinforcing in the process? How are the "results" I'm optimized for shaping my behaviors, mindset, and identity? What personal standards and goals could I optimize for in order to build healthier habit-systems?

This systems-level approach should inform our learning, and also our teaching. If you want to really teach someone something, it isn't enough to craft a lesson and leave it to the student to either learn or not. You should help the student plan an approach to the work needed to make the most of that lesson. You should offer them the tools to facilitate that work, and establish habits that will serve them in the long term.[4]

As Jacques Barzun wrote, "The truth is, when all is said and done, one does not teach a subject, one teaches a student how to learn it."[5] Ultimately, the student must do the work of learning. How successful they are, and how well they continue to learn throughout their life, is a matter of building the foundational systems that make intellectual work natural, habitual, and efficient. Give them learning tools, study habits, spaces rich with resources, a sound work ethic, a mindset that embraces challenge, an exemplary culture, and a confident identity as a learner. If you want to help them achieve a goal, help them translate that goal into specific behaviors, and help them integrate those behaviors into their life. Help them build supportive environments. Help them see themselves differently, and internalize the values that make their work toward that goal feel authentic.

Short-term results unfortunately matter a great deal more than they should. They heavily influence a school's funding and prestige, a teacher's employment, a parent's approval, and a student's job prospects and self-esteem. This is the high-stakes schooling environment we've made, which nearly always places signaling value above developing real human assets —which ignores the complex systems involved in student performance and merely coerces outcomes—outcomes that say much less about the real potential of a student than we like to believe.

Results do matter, of course. They can give us important feedback about our learning and teaching. But we should be careful about which results we prioritize.[6] And we should be sure that the systems of education we create and employ are optimized for the results we value most (whether or not they are easily quantifiable). When we feel pressured to focus on narrow, short-term metrics, we should remember to broaden our concern. Obsessing over these metrics can undermine what are ultimately more important standards of a successful education, and a successful life.[7]

To the extent that schools solve problems, they often do so superficially and temporarily. The problems they address are far from all educational problems. The needs they serve are far from all of our educational needs. A student's performance isn't just a matter of innate talent or other variables confined to schools. The systems that influence performance span

the largest spheres of culture, the values of families, down to the self-concepts and small habits of the individual learner. These are influences that each of us can choose to improve, in small and large ways, for ourselves and others. We can integrate healthy habits of mind and body into our daily lives, and design our environments to empower these habits. The results of this practice would be genuine, enduring, and truly profound.

Footnotes

[1] In many cases the limitations of schools aren't their fault. They can't do everything—and we shouldn't expect them to. Indeed, it's the fantasy that schools can solve all our educational problems that allows many people to abdicate the educational responsibilities that are within their purview.

Here are some reasons why schools often can't effectively address habits:
– Long-term habit formation benefits from an inquiry into behavioral influences beyond the scope of schools, i.e. friends, family, community, culture, physical and mental health.
– Habit formation also benefits from goals that are intrinsically motivating, such that students will continue to pursue them away from the pressure of the school, but students' learning behaviors often begin and end with extrinsic motivation.
– Forming effective habits takes time, and schools are on a tight, rigid schedule, often moving on before a habit can take root; teaching a student "how to learn" takes valuable time away from the necessary curriculum.
– It is difficult for a single teacher to give a large group of students the individual attention that systems-level solutions demand—they must make due coaxing results.

[2] Two books that review the academic literature on these effects are:

[Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993]

[Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996]

[3]

> [W]here in our educational system do we introduce this crucial concept [of purpose] to our students? And when do we spend the time and effort to help our students match their abilities and interests with particular job choices (or even, in economic language, with the demands of the labor marketplace)? Too many young people are left to their own devices with respect to some of life's largest questions: What is my calling? What do I have to contribute to the world? What am I here for? It is as if we are running away from these questions, apprehensive about facing them, either for ourselves or for our children. ...

> In order to find purpose, children must survey the world around them and determine where and how they can make their own contribution. They must get to know themselves well enough to see how their own talents and interests match some niche that the world has to offer. This means that they must come to understand both themselves and the world that they are growing up in, which may not be the same world their parents grew up in. They must formulate a long-term goal to make a difference in that world, and they must learn how to make a realistic plan to pursue their objective. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 46-47, 132]

[4]

> The therapist's problem refers to the fact that it's hard to at once help young people when they're under our care and prepare them to apply their skills effectively after they leave our care. ...
>
> For many parents, most of the time they will spend with their children in their lifetimes will be over when their child turns eighteen. Have they spent that time wisely, in a way that will stay with their children for the next seventy or eighty years of their lives?
>
> Secondary and postsecondary teachers get ... [r]oughly four to five hours per week for nine or ten months. Have we given our students content knowledge and learning strategies that will help them in the next year's class—let alone throughout their academic careers? ...
>
> [The name of this problem] in the scientific literature is *fade-out*. This refers to well-intentioned programs that have a short-term impact but don't help in the long run. ...
>
> [*Mentoring for future growth*] solves the therapist's problem. [This] happens when the *processes* we use with young people instill skills or ways of thinking that continue to help them after they leave our care. [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 282-284]

[5] [*Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, Chicago UP, 1991, pp. 35-36]

[6] Just as importantly, we should be careful that by using certain outcomes for the purposes of accountability we do not pervert or "rig" our systems of education to inflate them.

[7]

> To begin with, we must embrace a healthier and radically different way of thinking about success. We need to harness our fears about our children's futures and understand that the extraordinary focus on metrics that has come to define success today—high grades, trophies, and selective school acceptances from preschools to graduate schools—is a partial and frequently deceptive definition. At its best, it encourages academic success for a small group of students but gives short shrift to the known factors that are necessary for success later in life. ... [It] fails to acknowledge those students whose potential contributions are not easily measurable. If we insist on a narrow and metric-based definition of success then we

> maddeningly consign potentially valuable contributions to our society to an undervalued and even bleak future. ...
>
> While we all hope our children will do well in school, we hope with even greater fervor that they will do well in life. Our job is to help them to know and appreciate themselves deeply; to approach the world with zest; to find work that is exciting and satisfying, friends and spouses who are loving and loyal; and to hold a deep belief that they have something meaningful to contribute to society. This is what it means to teach our children well. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. xv-xvi]

Discussion Material



Introductory Notes

– First, read through the entire list of discussion questions to get an idea of the scope of the course.

As mentioned in the Syllabus, each document is meant to be read and discussed with a tutor or any kind of partner, one week at a time (or at whatever pace suits you best).

I recommend starting with questions #1-3, then choosing questions based on what is most relevant and interesting to you; assessing these things for yourself is an important part of the course. While topics are roughly grouped together, these groupings aren't in a particular order. (Topics are numbered merely for ease of reference. Related topics are listed at the bottom of each Discussion Material page.)

– Before addressing a discussion question, spend some time asking it yourself. (e.g. Why should I take more responsibility for my education?) Make the question *yours*, so you have a personal stake in finding an answer. This will fundamentally improve your experience of the reading.

– Read in a comfortable setting. Make yourself a cup of tea, or whatever you prefer to relax and focus. This course deals with serious topics; make the time and space to treat the material seriously,[1] and to *enjoy yourself.*

The ideas I've collected here are some of the most thought-provoking and incisive that I've found, addressing the most important and recurrent issues, from many of the most influential books on (and around) the subject of education. This is to say that I've tried my best to value your time by offering content that rewards deep thought, and is worth making a sincere effort to explore.

– As you read, take notes to reference in discussion later. Pay attention to how you react to certain ideas. Note your agreement, disagreement, confusion, praise, etc.

As always, be mindful of how you feel about the task itself. What is your attitude going into it? Is it an imposition or a voluntary exploration? Did you find the reading rewarding

or not? How much effort did you put into it? Remember that you control the work being done, and you evaluate its benefit as well as your performance.

– As you read and discuss, think about the ideas from the perspective of both student and teacher.

It's easy for the young to disown the role of teacher, and adults the role of student. But the young can't afford to be mere students. They should appreciate the critical influence they have on their peers, how giant and authoritative they appear to those only a few years younger, the educative effects of their actions on the adults around them, and their likely future role as parents.

Adults, similarly, can't afford to be mere teachers. They might label studenthood as inferior and abandon it as soon as possible, but our authority as teachers is directly related to our continuing development as students. The more we exemplify the benefits of learning on behalf of ourselves, the more we inspire our students to do the same. And as we choose to make learning a primary activity throughout our lives, we create a culture of more enlightened values, capable of improving the world in countless ways.

The young and old will both benefit from a greater sympathy for one-another in educational encounters. If students can gain insight into the minds of their teachers (their struggles and deeper motives) and if teachers can know the minds of their students (how they are inhibited, their true needs and potentials) education may become much simpler and more efficient.

– Look further into an author or title if you find a quote interesting. This can provide meaningful context and reveal more avenues to explore.

Also, I strongly encourage you to seek out other resources to use in your discussions. The ideas provided here are meant to promote a larger, ongoing conversation—on which there are many more valuable perspectives.

– Some discussion questions contain opposing answers, this is to juxtapose different ideas that should be reconciled. There's usually some truth to be found on either side of an issue, and something valuable in being able to integrate seemingly contradictory perspectives. It is

important to think critically about each topic, and fashion for yourself a reasoned and coherent perspective.

– If you are a young person working through the course with a tutor, share your work with your family. Take some time to share your thoughts and ask about theirs. This will not only reinforce the material in your mind, it will also expose them to important ideas, and contribute to a supportive intellectual environment in your home.

Footnotes

[1] I understand the virtue of seriousness to be a desire to seek out what is most important, to get to the bottom of things, to stay focused on what matters. ... [T]he serious person looks for depth, reaches for more, longs for reality. ... A serious person wants what is best and most true for himself or herself. ...

[The humanizing effect of learning] begins in the readers' or the inquirers' deep engagement with learning, their assumption of the responsibility of being transformed by what they learn, their treatment of learning as a part of getting down into the depths of life. ... It is the virtue of seriousness that permits our thinking and learning to shape our moral lives and our lives with others. Without it, intellectual life risks superficiality ... [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, pp. 144, 175]

1. Why should we take more responsibility for our education?

1 All genuine learning is active, not passive. ... It is a process of discovery, in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, p. 50]

2 Education is a seeking, probing, taking-from process, and the initiative must rest with the seeker. As great as is my stake in your better education, I must concede that your progress depends on your desire to learn, that this inquisitiveness into the nature of things is a truly spiritual experience—the spirit of inquiry—that this is *wholly volitional* and that you are the sole possessor of your volitional stimuli. [Leonard Read, *Anything That's Peaceful: The Case for the Free Market*, The Foundation for Economic Education, 1964, pp. 198-203]

3 [Y]ou don't really learn seriously unless you're teaching yourself, unless you're [learning] for your own reasons. ... There's no learning without the participation of the learner. ...

The mind is not just a passive sponge for content ... We are active seekers of knowing and understanding and imagining. And in order for us to learn well and live well we have to find within ourselves the questions, the desires, to learn. ...

[W]e can help one another, and experts can help us too, but in the end it's really what *you* do. That's the nature of learning. [Zena Hitz, "The Great Books Are For Everyone," *YouTube*, uploaded by The Honest Broker, 19 June 2026, 35:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8DxjoayF0g]

4 No one can be made to learn against his or her will. Learning is a personal choice. Of course, under conditions of compulsion and penalty even the most reluctant learners will grudgingly commit ideas to memory to avoid unpleasant consequences. But the spirit of democratic education requires that students learn willingly. ...

Education *is* personal or it is nothing. ...

Some of the more powerful tools for promoting creativity, communication and collaboration ever devised now offer unprecedented opportunities for education to be personalized: to cater for the interests, abilities and learning styles of every student. [Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds: The Power of Being Creative*, Capstone, 2011, pp. 251-252]

5 I believe the reason we are here is to learn, which is to say, to evolve. By "evolve" I mean to progress. ...

[T]he deliberate choice to learn and grow is primarily one that we make or fail to make as adults. During our childhood, most of our learning is "passive." ... [T]he child may work in certain ways at learning, but generally only because of outside pressure in the form of homework assignments, tests, grades, and expectations at home. ...

Mysterious though it is, the choice to actively learn as an adult and devote one's will consciously to growth and learning is the most crucial decision one ever makes in life. But when is this choice made? Again, the issue has not been scientifically studied the way it should be. ... But [the choice] can be made as early as mid-adolescence. [M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled and Beyond: Spiritual Growth in an Age of Anxiety*, Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 95-106]

6 The capacity for self-regulation is probably the single most important contributor to achievement, mental health, and social success. The ability to exercise control over what we think, what we feel, and what we do protects against a wide range of psychological disorders, contributes to more satisfying and fulfilling relationships, and facilitates accomplishment in the worlds of school and work. In study after study of adolescents, in samples of young people ranging from privileged suburban youth to destitute inner-city teenagers, those who score high on measures of self-regulation invariably fare best—they get better grades in school, are more popular with their classmates, are less likely to get into trouble, and are less likely to develop emotional problems. This makes developing self-regulation the central task of adolescence, and the goal that we should be pursuing as parents, educators, and health care professionals. [Lawrence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 16]

7 I consider especially crucial the notion of building up the student's own sense of responsibility—for learning, for maintaining progress, for devising and carrying out a meaningful network of projects or enterprises, and for making it a natural habit of mind to reflect on her progress. ...

The student is asked to bring about change in herself rather than to wait for change to be imposed from the outside (or to believe that change cannot occur at all) and to accept the possibility that assessment may be the burden not of the teacher primarily but of the learner herself. [Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Basic Books, 1991, pp. 242-243]

8 To the extent that students can craft their own goals, keep track of their own accomplishments, reflect on their own thinking and learning—where it has improved, where it continues to fall short—they become partners in their own education. Even more crucially, once formal schooling has concluded, it should have become second nature for adults to keep on learning—sometimes alone, sometimes in groups—for as long as they choose; indeed, one hopes, for the rest of their lives. [Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*, 1999, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2021, p. 135]

9 [T]he *salient* virtue that most teachers, classical or progressive, have always hoped for in letting the student discover for himself, [is] namely the development of his confidence that he *can*, that he is adequate to the nature of things, can proceed on his own initiative, and ultimately strike out on an unknown path, where there is no program, and assign his own tasks to himself. The classical maxim of teaching is: to bring the student to where he casts off the teacher. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 86]

10 When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the foot-prints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965), p. 252]

11 It is through spontaneous exploration that young people acquire much of their skill, self-confidence, and insights into life's possibilities. This is one of the key avenues to competence. As they freely explore the world, young people exercise their powers and discover their interests. They learn about people, places, and themselves in profound ways that are unavailable to them in schools and other less "contextualized" settings. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 230-231]

12 Our energies are overwhelmingly directed toward material, scientific, and technical subjects and away from psychological and emotional ones. Much anxiety surrounds the question of how good the next generation will be at math; very little around their abilities at marriage or kindness. We devote inordinate hours to learning about tectonic plates and cloud formations, and relatively few fathoming shame and rage.

The assumption is that emotional insight might be either unnecessary or in essence unteachable, lying beyond reason or method, an unreproducible phenomenon best abandoned to individual instinct and intuition. We are left to find our own path around our unfeasibly complicated minds—a move as striking (and as wise) as suggesting that each generation should rediscover the laws of physics by themselves. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, p. 1]

13 We commonly see adolescents and young adults go off to college without having had much of an opportunity to make decisions about the things that matter, including how they want to structure their time, what they want to commit their energy to, or whether they want to be in school at all. Not surprisingly, they have difficulty setting and meeting goals and making good decisions when it comes time to pick classes or a major or more generally to manage their day. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 61-62]

14 There is a principal in the human mind by which a man seems to know his own time, and it will sometimes be much better that he should engage in the perusal of books at the period of his own choice, than at the time that you may recollect to put them in his hands. Man is a creature that loves to act from himself; and actions performed in this way, have infinitely more of sound health and vigour in them, than the actions to which

he is prompted by a will foreign to his own. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 1797, Garland, 1971, p. 144, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

15 [O]ur most rapid, efficient, far-reaching, useful, and permanent learning comes from our doing things that *we ourselves* have decided to do, and that in doing such things we often need very little help or none at all. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 16]

16 [Y]ou cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education: you will do much better to think of being here to claim one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb "to claim" is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. "To receive" is to come into possession of: to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon ... [Adrienne Rich, "Claiming an Education," speech delivered at Douglass College convocation, 1977, https://www.yorku.ca/cvandaal/files/ClaimingAnEducation.pdf]

17 The curriculum is not there to be mastered ... nor is it there to be experienced ... It is there to be *chosen*. The subject matters and experiences in a curriculum shall be merely *available*; to be learned, they must first be opted for, sought out, and appropriated by the student. [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, pp. 123-124]

18 It seems that the impression we derive from a book, depends much less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and the preparation with which we read it. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 1797, Garland, 1971, p. 135, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

19 [W]hen burnout occurs it is "almost always an indication that the person's goals have been externally imposed. Somehow he embarked on his present course because it was expected of him ... He was never the authentic source of his choices and consequently they afford little real satisfaction." [H. J. Freudenberger, *Burnout: The High Cost of*

Achievement, quoted by Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, p. 171]

20 In this book I have four goals: to illuminate the meaning and implication of self-responsibility as a way of living and of being in the world; to show that this practice is not an onerous burden but a source of joy and personal power; to establish that we create our selves, shape our identity, through what we are willing to take responsibility for; and to demonstrate that self-responsibility, as well as self-reliance and individualism are essential to the well-being of our society. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 16]

21 The truth is, when all is said and done, one does not *teach a subject*, one teaches a student how to learn it. Teaching may look like administering a dose, but even a dose must be worked on by the body if it is to cure. Each individual must cure his or her own ignorance. Accordingly, all sound educational theory enjoins individual attention. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, U of Chicago P, 1991, pp. 35-36]

22 [Learning] begins in hiding ... The hidden life of learning is its core, what matters about it. ... Learning, knowing, studying, and contemplating are activities that live and breathe in individual human beings, even if they are nurtured, cultivated, and preserved in communities and with the help of various instruments. ...

It is evident that our human core—our inner resources for thought, reflection, and contemplation—cannot be nurtured by mass education, whether that be online learning or large lecture halls. It must be nurtured person to person or it will largely disappear from ordinary human experience, surviving only in disfigured and marginal ways. ...

[T]he inner work of learning is fundamental to human happiness, as far from pointless wheel spinning as are the forms of tenderness we owe our children or grandchildren. Intellectual work is a form of loving service at least as important as cooking, cleaning, or raising children; as essential as the provision of shelter, safety, or health care; as valuable as the delivery of necessary goods and services; as crucial as the administration of justice. [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, pp. 22-23]

23 [I]f our goals are more ambitious—if we want children to make good values their own over the long haul—then there is no substitute for giving them the chance to become actively involved in deciding what kind of people they want to be and what kind of classroom or school they want to have. ...

As Constance Kamii has written, "We cannot expect children to accept ready-made values and truths all the way through school, and then suddenly make choices in adulthood." [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

24 We have more choices and options than ever before in every area. Frontiers of limitless possibilities now face us in whatever direction we look. To be adaptive in such an environment, to cope appropriately, we have a greater need for personal autonomy ... We need to know who we are and to be centered within ourselves. We need to know what matters to us; otherwise it is easy to be swept up and swept along by alien values, pursuing goals that do not nourish who we really are. We must learn to think for ourselves, to cultivate our own resources, and to take responsibility for the choices, values, and actions that shape our lives. We need reality-based self-trust and self-reliance. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 23-24]

Related:
– Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?
– Why might it be difficult to assume the responsibility of education?

2. Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?

1 It's astonishing to us how many kids have never asked themselves what it is they want, or have never had someone ask it of them. They're too busy either trying to please others, or rebelling against others' control. But they need to think for themselves about themselves. They need to consider their special talents and life purpose. They should ask, "What do I want? What do I love to do?" You can help them ask these questions, even if you can't supply the answers. Hard as it may be to accept this, it's your child's responsibility to find interests and motivation in life. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 126]

2 [Purpose is] "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self." [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose*] ...

To help kids feel they matter, we must help them get beyond themselves and recognize needs beyond their own. ... In an era of unprecedented focus on the self, on social media and in the media, getting beyond the relentless drumbeat of "me" and into the lives of others can be a gift. According to the psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman, "The self ... is a very poor site for meaning." [*Learned Optimism*, 1991] ...

If mattering is being socially recognized, supported, and feeling valuable to others, young people will need to ask: *What do I want to contribute to the world? How do I want people to invest in me? What do I want to be relied on for?* ... [They] need to look up from their achieving and ask these questions about themselves and their priorities. For many who spend a lot of high school in Achiever mode, it's only when they go off to college or start work that they realize they have not asked themselves these most basic questions. *What do I like? How do I want to contribute? Who do I want to be?* Finding one's place in society requires some trial and error, and rooting around, sometimes inefficiently. To ask big questions like *What do I care about?* requires reflection, which means more downtime and introspection—things busy kids in Achiever mode typically don't do. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn*

Better, Feel Better, and Live Better, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 193-194]

3 The message that young people do best when they are challenged to strive, to achieve, to serve ... fails to address the most essential question of all: *For what purpose?* Or, in a word, *Why?* For young people, this concern means starting to ask, and answer questions such as: What do I hope to accomplish with all my efforts, with all the striving that I am expected to do? What are the higher goals that give these efforts meaning? What matters to me; and why should it matter? What is my ultimate concern in life? Unless we make such questions a central part of our conversations with young people, we can do little but sit back and watch while they wander into a sea of confusion, drift, self-doubt, and anxiety—feelings that too often arise when work and striving are unaccompanied by a sense of purpose. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. xiv]

4 By the time we are adults we have been bombarded with countless value judgments by parents, teachers, and peers, to say nothing of the culture at large. ... We have been exposed to any number of ideas about work, ambition, money, and success. We receive messages about what constitutes the "good life." To what extent do we think about these views and to what extent to we absorb them without thinking? To what extent will *we* decide and to what extent to we allow others to decide for us? ...

[W]hen it comes to such questions as "For what purpose should I live? How should I deal with other people? What deserves my admiration and what does not? By what principles should I act? What kind of life should I strive to create for myself?" *An independent person knows that there are no "experts" to whom one can safely surrender one's intellect.* [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 60-61]

5 Trust in families and neighborhoods and individuals to make sense of the important question, "What is education for?" ... [S]uch a question must be framed and not taken for granted if anything beyond a mockery of democracy is to be nurtured. It is illegitimate to have an expert answer that question for you. [John Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, pp. 93-94]

6 The assumption has been prevalent for so long that we all know what constitutes an "educated man," that the fact that this comfortable definition is now *completely irrelevant* to modern society is almost never faced. So this chapter constitutes a challenge to educators at all levels. If my concept of the fully functioning person is abhorrent to you as the goal of education, then give *your* definition of the person who should emerge from modern day education, and publish it for all to see. We need many such definitions so that there can be a really significant *modern* dialogue as to what constitutes our optimum, or ideal citizen of *today*. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, pp. 295-296]

7 [I]t is a test of a mature and a free society that in each generation there are sufficient writers prepared to persist with awkward but searching questions and an equally sufficient number of patient individuals willing to consider them. Failure to undertake such discussion means the triumph of prejudice and an acceptance of institutions from mere habit or imitation rather than from any conscious and rational purpose.

The story of education might well illustrate the way in which societies can easily deceive themselves about their own institutions because of an insufficient and inconstant scrutiny of the reasoning and evidence which is supposed to support them. [Edwin G. West, *Education and the State: A Study in Political Economy*, 1965, Liberty Fund, 3rd ed., 1994, pp. xxiii-xxv]

8 The great tragedy of our lives is that the major question of our existence is never put *by* us—it is put by personal and social impulsions *for* us. ... "What is my unique gift, my authentic talent?" As the great Carlyle saw, this is the main problem of a life, the only genuine problem, the one that should bother and preoccupy us all through the early years of our struggle for identity; all through the years when we are tempted to solve the problem of our identity by taking the expedient that our parents, the corporation, the nation offer us; and it is the one that does bother many of us in our middle and later years when we pass everything in review to see if we really had discovered it when we thought we did. [Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*, Free Press, 1971, p. 187]

9 What is one's true talent, his secret gift, his authentic vocation? In what way is one truly unique, and how can he express this uniqueness, give it form, dedicate it to something

beyond himself? How can the person take his private inner being, the great mystery that he feels at the heart of himself, his emotions, his yearnings and use them to live more distinctively, to enrich both himself and mankind with the peculiar quality of his talent? In adolescence, most of us throb with this dilemma, expressing it either with words and thoughts or with simple numb pain and longing. But usually life sucks us up into standardized activities. [Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 1973, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 82-83]

10 [Robert] Hutchins wanted a Great Community, a community now and in the future. And the way he proposed to get it was by a Great Conversation, a conversation between specialists and generalists, all sharing a common fund of knowledge and ideas. How else talk with anyone, unless you share with him a common fund of knowledge and presuppositions? And in this way, one generation could be in touch with the other, draw from it, and build on it, steadily and surely. ...

[W]hat makes a conversation great rather than trivial? Simply, that it asks the big questions, the questions of ultimate concern. The reason that our conversations are not great, and that we have no real community, is that we steadfastly refuse to ask the big questions, or try to seek answers to them in common. Instead we ask the little questions, the questions that keep our daily work going in its prescribed ruts, the questions that look out for tomorrow by automatically following the routine of the day, by accepting uncritically the world as we find it, and by not caring too strongly what we are really doing in it, or are supposed to be doing. The big concerns and the big designs pass us by, as we keep each to his own narrow game. ... What is the good life? What is the good State? What is the nature of the cosmos? What is the nature and destiny of man in the cosmos? [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 14-15]



11 The great problems of human society are plainly too vexatious and difficult to be set before college undergraduates or pupils yet lower down the scale. The best that the teacher can hope to do, considering the short time at his disposal and the small attention that he can engage, is to fill his students with certain broad generalizations and

conclusions. [H. L. Mencken, "Bearers of the Torch," 1923, *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, Vintage, 1982, p. 315]

12 [Schopenhauer] remarked that no child under the age of fifteen should receive instruction in subjects that might be the vehicle of serious error, and recommended concentration before fifteen on such disciplines as mathematics, natural science, and languages. The object of those studies dealing directly with society must be to lay the basis of lifelong participation in the dialogue about the issues they raise. ...

[I]t is self-evident that subjects that require maturity cannot be taught to the immature. An introduction to the dialogue is one thing; systematic instruction in the discipline, with the idea that understanding is communicated, is another. [Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 125-127]

13 [T]here is nothing wrong, in principle, with the expression of concern for planet-wide issues. That is not the point. There is something wrong, however, with overestimating your knowledge of such things—or perhaps even considering them—when you are a mid-twenty-year-old with nothing positive going on in your life and you are having great difficulty even getting out of bed. Under those conditions, you need to get your priorities straight, and establishing the humility necessary to attend to and solve your own problems is a crucial part of doing just that. ...

Excuse the cliché, but it is necessary to walk before you can run. You may even have to crawl before you can walk. This is part of accepting your position as a beginner, at the bottom of the hierarchy you so casually, arrogantly, and self-servingly despise. Furthermore, the deeply anti-human attitude that often accompanies tears shed for environmental degradation and man's inhumanity to man cannot help but have a marked effect on the psychological attitude that defines a person's relationship to him or herself.

It has taken since time immemorial for us to organize ourselves, biologically and socially, into the functional hierarchies that both specify our perceptions and actions, and define our interactions with the natural and social world. Profound gratitude for that gift is the only proper response. The structure that encompasses us all has its dark side—just as nature does, just as each individual does—but that does not mean careless, generic, and self-serving criticism of the status quo is appropriate (and more than knee-jerk objection

to what might be necessary change). [Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, Penguin / Portfolio, 2021, pp. 32-34]



14 Contemporary education, whether traditional or progressive, is well known for its failure to implicate the child in moral and ethical questions. Such questions are allegedly too touchy or too personal for classroom discussion. ... By insulating the learner from thinking about and *feeling* the intensity of explosive questions, the parent and the parent-intimidated teacher cannot possibly awaken a youngster to his existential freedom and to his sense of individual responsibility for directing his own moral life. The child remains passive and "cool" about the struggle between right and wrong in the world. Teaching continues to be carried on in the third person; the phenomena to which the learner's attention is directed are all outside his own skin. [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What It Means*, 1966, Waveland Press, 1990, p. 119]

15 [T]he first implication [of client-centered therapy] for education might well be that we permit the student, at any level, to be in real contact with the relevant problems of his existence, so that he perceives problems and issues which he wishes to resolve. ...

[The teacher's] basic reliance would be upon the self-actualizing tendency in his students. The hypothesis upon which he would build is that students who are in real contact with life problems wish to learn, want to grow, seek to find out, hope to master, desire to create. He would see his function as that of developing such a personal relationship with his students, and such a climate in his classroom, that these natural tendencies could come to their fruition. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, pp. 286-290]

16 [C]hoose the crucial problems, particularly the problems that are prompting change within our culture. Let those problems and our procedure for thinking about them be part of what school and classwork are about. This does not mean that school becomes a rallying place for discussion of the culture's failures. But ... [for] probing into the human condition—Past, Present, and Possible—with the Troubles that keep that topic as current today as it ever was. ...

> Remember what I said earlier: Trouble is the engine of narrative and the justification for going public with a story. It is the whiff of trouble that leads us to search out the relevant or responsible constituents in the narrative, in order to convert the raw Trouble into a manageable Problem that can be handled with procedural muscle. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, pp. 98-99]

17 > [T]he teacher who is unclear on important questions finds that somebody will happily impose external clarity. An instructional vacuum—an empty teacher—is quickly filled by other teachers, parents, principals, school committees, and superintendents. [Roland Barth, *Run School Run*, quoted by Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, p. 170]

18 > [Jerome Bruner] has addressed himself to the question, How can we improve our schools? Perhaps it is obvious that his answers are administrator's answers. It may not be obvious, however, that his question is the question of the technocrat. For given the current crisis in education, the question, How can we improve our schools? would satisfy neither the scientist nor the philosopher. Both would ask instead, How can we educate our young? [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, p. 250]

19 > You need to consider the future and think, "What might my life look like if I were caring for myself properly? What career would challenge me and render me productive and helpful, so that I could shoulder my share of the load, and enjoy the consequences? What should I be doing, when I have some freedom, to improve my health, expand my knowledge, and strengthen my body?" You need to know where you are, so you can start to chart your course. You need to know who you are, so that you understand your armament and bolster yourself in respect to your limitations. You need to know where you are going, so that you can limit the extent of chaos in your life, restructure order, and bring the divine force of Hope to bear on the world. [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, pp. 62-63]

20 > Your professors will give you some fine books to read, and they'll probably help you understand them. What they won't do, for reasons that perplex me, is to ask you if the books contain truths you could live your lives by. When you read Plato, you'll probably learn about his metaphysics and his politics and his way of conceiving the soul. But no

one will ask you if his ideas are good enough to believe in. ... No one, in short, will ask you to use Plato to help you change your life. ...

That will be up to you. ...

And you will have to be tough if the professor mocks you for uttering a sincere question instead of keeping matters easy for all concerned by staying detached and analytical. (Detached analysis has a place—but, in the end, you've got to speak from the heart and pose the question of truth.) [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 64-65]

21 [It is] impossible ... to give the students genuine possession of the truth without ever really perplexing them first by the problems or issues which the truth resolves ... [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 180-181]

22 Next to no consideration has been paid to the fundamental necessity—leading the child to realize a problem as his own, so that he is self-induced to attend in order to find out its answer. [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, pp. 151-152, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

23 Answers to questions you [haven't] raised will be knowledge you [won't] use. ...

We are constrained and enabled by our purposes for knowing. ... If [one person comes] into a class and wants to learn this material for *life*, and some other person wants to spit back a reasonable response on an exam, they will *qualitatively know that material differently*. [Corey Anton, "Education and Ethics in the Digital Age," *YouTube*, uploaded by Ernest Becker Foundation, 28 Aug. 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOYhhqUviKY]

24 To think critically, people must feel motivated and free to voice their own ideas and raise their own questions. But in school students learn that their own ideas and questions don't count. What counts are their abilities to provide the "correct" answers to questions that they did not ask and that do not interest them. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 80]

25 In the end, the best way you can help your child maintain a sense of control and guide him (as a nonanxious consultant) into a satisfying life is to teach him to ask himself two questions: What do I truly love to do? And what can I do better than most people?

It can be that simple. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 319]

26 Unless we are deeply touched by the problem, we will never find the right way of education. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, pp. 48-49]

Related:
– Why should we take more responsibility for our education?
– What constitutes a successful adolescence?

3. What is education for? What should the goals of education be?

1 What are schools for? Yes, it matters if parents have a choice of schools, if schools are smaller, if class size is reduced ... But are we not left with the question, *Why?* What is all the sound and fury and expense about? If a metaphor may be permitted, we can make the trains run on time, but if they do not go where we want them to go, why bother? ...

This, it seems to me, is a fine and noble story to offer as a reason for schooling: to provide our youth with the knowledge and will to participate in the great experiment; to teach them how to argue, and to help them discover what questions are worth arguing about; and, of course, to make sure they know what happens when arguments cease. ...

[T]here are still more ideas that can provide respectable, humane, and substantive reasons for schooling, I have no doubt. The purpose of this book is not only to put forward reasons that make sense but to play a role in promoting a serious conversation *about* reasons. Not about policies, management, assessment, and other engineering matters. These are important, but they ought rightfully to be addressed *after* decisions are made about what schools are for. ... [W]e cannot fail to improve the lives of our young if all parties could enter the conversation with enthusiasm and resolve. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 61, 73-74, 91]

2 [T]he far goal of education—as of psychotherapy, of family life, of work, of society, of life itself—is to aid the person to grow to fullest humanness, to the greatest fulfillment and actualization of his highest potentials, to his greatest possible stature. ...

[E]ducation is properly a universal, ubiquitous, and life-long proposition. It implies education for all the human capacities, not only the cognitive ones ... for adults as well as for children. And it implies that education is certainly not confined to the classroom. ...

The better we know which ends we want, the easier it is for us to create truly efficient means to those ends. If we are not clear about those ends, or deny that there are any, then we are doomed to confusion of instruments. We can't speak about efficiency unless we know efficiency for what. (I want to quote again that veritable symbol of our times, the test pilot who radioed back, "I'm lost, but I'm making record time.")

[E]ducation—like all our social institutions—must be concerned with its final values, and this in turn is just about the same as speaking of what have been called "spiritual values" or "higher values." These are the principles of choice which help us to answer the age-old "spiritual" (philosophical? religious? humanistic? ethical?) questions: What is the good life? ... What is the good society and what is my relation to it? What are my obligations to society? What is best for my children? What is justice? Truth? Virtue? What is my relation to nature, to death, to aging, to pain, to illness? How can I live a zestful, enjoyable, meaningful life? [Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, 1964, Penguin Compass, 1994, pp. 49-52]

3 How to live?—that is the essential question for us. Not how to live in the mere material sense only, but in the widest sense. ... In what way to treat the body; in what way to treat the mind; in what way to manage our affairs; in what way to bring up a family; in what way to behave as a citizen; in what way to utilize all those sources of happiness which nature supplies—how to use all our faculties to the greatest advantage of ourselves and others—how to live completely? And this being the great thing needful for us to learn, is, by consequence, the great thing which education has to teach. [Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical*, 1860, D. Appleton, 1896, p. 26, https://archive.org/details/spencereducation00spen]

4 Throughout the centuries, five theories of education have been most popularly accepted by philosophers and schools. Each prescribes different answers to the questions of Purpose, Content, and Method. To formulate a proper philosophy of education, an evaluation of these approaches is both instructive and necessary. ...

Classical Theory. Education is essentially the communication of factual knowledge. ... The test of success: How much has [the student] learned?

Socialization Theory. ... [T]he purpose of education is to train children in social adjustment, enabling them to become useful members of the group, the community, and society. ... The test of success: How well does he relate to others?

Child-Centered Theory. Education is a means of individuating the child. The purpose of education is to enable the child to discover, realize, and fulfill his own self. ... The test of success: How independent is he?

Moral or Behavioral Theory. Education is essentially a means of developing morality in the child. Different terms may be substituted for the word *morality*: virtue, conscience, a sense of values, good character, good habits, proper pleasures, right emotions, mental health. ... The test of success: How good is his character?

Cognitive Theory. ... [E]ducation is essentially training in ... the methods of thinking, of using reason, of using one's intelligence. ... [The] focus is training the child how to use his mind and how to think critically. ... The test of success: How effective are his thinking skills? ...

Your first reaction to evaluating these five theories may be that it is ridiculous to have to choose. You want your child to know something, to get along with others, to be an individual, to be moral, and to think correctly, so why sit and agonize about which theory is the best? ...

We are looking for the primary, the root on which everything else is going to be built. When you are at the level of primaries, you cannot choose everything, despite the fact that some aspects may be good or desirable. ... Each of these theories ... as the primary ... dictates the entire approach to education, both in method and content. [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, pp. 4-8]

5 This is in fact the test and the use of a human being's education, that he finds pleasure in the exercise of his mind. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning,* U of Chicago P, 1991, p. 216]

6 You want the inside of your head to be an interesting place to spend the rest of your life. [Judith Shapiro, former president of Barnard College, quoted by Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 33]

7 The highest function of education, I maintain, is to help people understand the meaning of their lives, and become more sensitive to the meaning of other people's lives and relate to them more fully. Education increases the range and complexity of relationships that make sense to us, to which we can contribute, and on which we can bring to bear competent ethical and practical judgment. If we are to transcend our own immediate environment, we must have access to the record of past and present, learn the

skills needed to interpret it, and learn to tell good data from poor, whether it be the empirical data of the sciences or the moral and aesthetic data of the humanities. We must be able to read, and to know where what we read fits into the structure of human experience; and to write with enough subtlety and complexity to convey the special quality of our mind to others. We must explore, and we must have the privacy and authority necessary to protect ourselves from intrusion if we are to use our energy for exploration rather than defense. ...

This kind of education is merely what we have always called liberal, in the sense of education appropriate to free men. [Edgar Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage / Random House, 1965, pp. 221-224]

8 The aim of education is to cultivate the individual's capacities for mental growth and moral development; to help him acquire the intellectual and moral virtues requisite for a good human life, spent publicly in political action or service and privately in a noble or honorable use of free time for the creative pursuits of leisure, among which continued learning throughout life is preeminent.

Guided by the aim of education just stated, basic schooling must be liberal in character; that is, a preparation for liberty or a life of freedom—the political freedom enjoyed by citizens (or the ruling class in society) and the economic freedom of time free for the pursuits of leisure, time free from labor in the production of wealth and time free for political activity and intellectual or artistic pursuits. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 120]

9 [E]ducation is more than information, or skill, or propaganda. In each age education must take into account the condition of the age. But the educated mind is not a mere creature of its own time. Education is emancipation from herd opinion, self-mastery, capacity for self-criticism, suspended judgment, and urbanity ... I use the term 'liberal' not in the political sense, as if it meant half measures, but in its original sense meaning by a liberal education the kind of education which sets the mind free from the servitude of the crowd and from vulgar self-interests. [Everett Dean Martin, *The Meaning of a Liberal Education*, 1922] quoted by [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy,* George Braziller, 1967, pp. 34-35]

10 [I]t is within our power to tell our children … the absolute truth. *They will have succeeded if they discover something they love doing and learn how to do it well.* To say that this accomplishment is more important than making a lot of money and more important than fame or prestige is not idealism. For those of us who have been lucky enough to be happy in our adult vocations or avocations, it is the reality of our lives.

Educational success needs to be redefined accordingly. The goal of education is to bring children into adulthood having discovered things they enjoy doing and doing them at the outermost limits of their potential. The goal applies equally to every child, across the entire range of every ability. There are no first-class and second-class ways to enjoy the exercise of our realized capacities. It is a quintessentially *human* satisfaction, and its universality can connect us all. Opening the door to that satisfaction is what real education does. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 168]

11 Education is about finding out what form of work for you is close to being play—work you do so easily that it restores you as you go. Randall Jarrell once said that if he were a rich man, he would pay money to teach poetry to students. (I would, too, for what it's worth.) In saying that, he (like my father) hinted in the direction of a profound and true theory of learning. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, p. 66]

12 It will be the task of education to help each individual to find within himself that activity that will make him most happy, his life most filled with interest and that will then surely contribute to the happiness and interest of others as well. [Isaac Asimov, "Our Future in Education," *The Tyrannosaurus Prescription*, Prometheus, 1989, p. 17]

13 "The true object of education," wrote William Godwin in the first sentence of his *Enquirer* (1797), "like that of every other moral process, is the generation of happiness." I know of no better definition of the aim of education, but like all definitions, it is regressive, throwing us back on the need for further definitions. …

Happiness is an individual affair. … [But] as Godwin went on to say, man is a social being. "In society the interests of individuals are intertwisted with each other, and cannot be separated. Men should be taught to assist each other." In other words, a factor

in individual happiness is mutual aid, and these two aspects of man's existence are interdependent. Education is the process of their adjustment. ...

All the possible words we may use to express the purpose of education ... reduce to two complementary processes, which we can best describe as "individual growth" and "social initiation." ...

It is very necessary, of course, to deepen the concept of happiness, because we all soon discover how impermanent is the sense of well-being which comes from good nourishment, a pleasant environment, adequate means and perfect health. Happiness, in a word, is *psychological*, and all material riches are worthless unless we have peace of mind. This was realized by the ancient philosophers, by Confucius and Lâo-tse, by Socrates and Aristotle; and they therefore defined happiness in some such words as did Aristotle, who said that it is "an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue." But that, again, is merely a definition which demands further definitions, and so Aristotle had to define what he meant by *virtue*. ... Wisdom and understanding, knowing how to act or behave in given circumstances, the science of life—that is one aspect of virtue; but a man may have all this knowledge but not be able to control his own impulses and desires. He may have perfect understanding, but be a creature of bad habits. Knowledge and self-discipline are therefore two different aspects of virtue, both essential to happiness and both to be learned in the normal course of education. [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, pp. 109-111, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

14 [E]ducation must be conceived as aiding young humans in learning to use the tools of meaning making and reality construction, to better adapt to the world in which they find themselves and to help in the process of changing it as required. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, pp. 19-20]

15 Discovering *meaning for yourself* as well as discovering satisfying *purpose for yourself*, is a big part of what education is. [John Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, p. 62]

16 Too much apparatus, like too much bureaucracy, only inhibits the natural flow [of teaching and learning]. Free human dialogue, wandering wherever the agility of the mind allows, lies at the heart of education. If teachers do not have the time, the

incentive, or the wit to provide that; if students are too demoralized, bored or distracted to muster the attention their teachers need of them, then *that* is the educational problem which has to be solved—and solved from inside the experience of the teachers and the students. [Theodore Roszak, *The Cult of Information: The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking*, Pantheon, 1986, pp. 62-63] quoted by [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 26-27]

17 The hard task of education is to liberate and strengthen a youth's initiative, and at the same time to see to it that he knows what is necessary to cope with the on-going activities and culture of society, so that his initiative can be relevant. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 139-140]

18 I don't think education is basically a technological problem. It is a problem of drawing out of each youngster the best he has to give and of helping him to see the world he is involved in clearly enough to become himself—among other people—in it, while teaching him the skills he will need in the process. This is a custom operation, not for the assembly line ... [Edgar Friedenberg, *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms*, Beacon, 1965, p. 204]

19 Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, p. 196]

20 Education is not acquiring a stock of ready-made ideas, images, sentiments, beliefs, and so forth; it is learning to look, to listen, to think, to feel, to imagine, to believe, to understand, to choose and to wish. It is a postulant to a human condition learning to recognize himself as a human being in the only way in which this is possible: namely, by seeing himself in the mirror of an inheritance of human understandings and activities

and thus himself acquiring … the ability to throw back upon the world his own version of a human being in conduct which is both a self-disclosure and a self-enactment. [Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, Yale UP, 1989, pp. 66-67]

21 The great object of Education should be commensurate with the object of life. It should be a moral one; to teach self-trust; to inspire the youthful man with an interest in himself; with a curiosity touching his own nature; to acquaint him with the resources of his mind, and to teach him that there is all his strength … [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 10, 1909, pp. 133-134, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/emerson-the-works-of-ralph-waldo-emerson-vol-10-lectures-and-biographical-sketches]

22 "Our ultimate educational objective is a self-starting, self-criticizing, and self-nourishing mind—a mind that can function powerfully, creatively, and wisely under its own steam" [Theodore M. Greene, *Liberal Education Reconsidered*, 1953, p. 29]. A man, in other words, who could freely dispose of his own energies, beholden to no one in any uncritical or slavish way—a man who would inject the continually fresh and new into the world. Democratic man, in the original and now-lost meaning of the term. [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 35-36]

23 Because he helped to write the story, Thomas Jefferson, the Moses of the great democracy-god, knew what schools were for—to ensure that citizens would know when and how to protect their liberty. … It would not have come easily to the mind of such a man, as it does to political leaders today, that the young should be taught to read exclusively for the purpose of increasing their economic productivity. Jefferson had a more profound god to serve. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 13]

24 The educational end and the ultimate test of the value of what is learned is its use and application in carrying on and improving the common life of all. …

It is true that the aim of education is development of individuals to the utmost of their potentialities. But this statement in isolation leaves unanswered the question as to what

is the measure of the development. A society of free individuals in which all, through their own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others, is the only environment in which any individual can really grow normally to his full stature. [John Dewey, "The Need for a Philosophy of Education," 1934, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, pp. 11-12]

25 The task of education is to arouse the desire in another human being for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way. ... [i.e.] not thinking of yourself and your desires as the center of the universe; ... [asking:] Is what I desire, desirable? Is it what I *should* desire ... for my own life, and my life with others on this planet? [Gert Biesta, "The Beautiful Risk of Education," *YouTube*, uploaded by HKW 100 Years of Now, 8 June 2017, 22:50, 33:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMqFcVoXnTI]

26 Social union, social discipline, social morale—whatever we like to call that sense of belonging to one another, of living in perfect brotherhood—that is or should be the aim of education. [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, p. 60, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

27 To achieve the desired quality of democratic education, a one-track system of public schooling for twelve years must aim directly at three main objectives and make every effort to achieve them to a satisfactory degree. ...

The first of these objectives ... relates to that aspect of adult life which we call personal growth or self-improvement—mental, moral, and spiritual. Every child should be able to look forward not only to growing up but also to continued growth in all human dimensions throughout life. All should aspire to make as much of their powers as they can. Basic schooling should prepare them to take advantage of every opportunity for personal development that our society offers.

A second main objective has to do with another side of adult life—the individual's role as an enfranchised citizen of this republic. Citizens are the principal and permanent rulers of our society. Those elected to public office for a term of years are instrumental and transient rulers—in the service of the citizenry and responsible to the electorate.

The reason why universal suffrage in a true democracy calls for universal public schooling is that the former without the latter produces an ignorant electorate and amounts to a travesty of democratic institutions and processes. ... Hence, the second objective of basic schooling—an adequate preparation for discharging the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

This requires not only the cultivation of the appropriate civic virtues, but also a sufficient understanding of the framework of our government and of its fundamental principles.

The third main objective takes account of the adult's need to earn a living in one or another occupation.

The twelve years of basic schooling must prepare them for this task, *not* by training them for one or another particular job in our industrial economy, but by giving them the basic skills that are common to all work in a society such as ours.

Here then are the three common callings to which all our children are destined: to earn a living in an intelligent and responsible fashion, to function as intelligent and responsible citizens, and to make both of these things serve the purpose of leading intelligent and responsible lives—to enjoy as fully as possible all the goods that make a human life as good as it can be. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 16-18]

28 What basic purposes of education should the culture of schools fulfill? In my view, there are four: economic, cultural, social, and personal. ...

Education should enable students to become economically responsible and independent, ... understand and appreciate their own culture and to respect the diversity of others, ... become active and compassionate citizens, ... [and] engage with the world within them as well as the world around them. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 45-51]

29 The proper starting point is to ask what students should know and be able to do as a result of their education. ... As I see it, the four basic purposes [economic, cultural, social, and personal] suggest eight core competencies that schools should facilitate if they are really going to help students succeed in their lives. ...

Curiosity—the ability to ask questions and explore how the world works. ... *Creativity*—the ability to generate new ideas and to apply them in practice. ... *Criticism*—the ability to analyze information and ideas and to form reasoned arguments and judgments. ... *Communication*—the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a range of media and forms. ... *Collaboration*—the ability to work constructively with others. ... *Compassion*—the ability to empathize with others and to act accordingly. ... *Composure*—the ability to connect with the inner life of feeling and develop a sense of personal harmony and balance. ... *Citizenship*—the ability to engage constructively with society and to participate in the processes that sustain it. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 135-140]

30 The purpose of education is to give the student the intellectual tools to analyze, whether verbally or numerically, and to reach conclusions based on logic and evidence. The attempts of schools and colleges to encompass far more than they can handle are an important part of the reason why they are handling education so poorly. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 17-18]

31 The school should always have as its aim that the young man leave it as a harmonious personality, not as a specialist. This in my opinion is true in a certain sense even for technical schools, whose students will devote themselves to a quite definite profession. The development of general ability for independent thinking and judgment should always be placed foremost, not the acquisition of special knowledge. [Albert Einstein, "On Education," 1936, *Ideas and Opinions*, Three Rivers, 1982, p. 64]

32 Now, what is the significance of life? What are we living and struggling for? If we are being educated merely to achieve distinction, to get a better job, to be more efficient, to have wider domination over others, then our lives will be shallow and empty. If we are being educated only to be scientists, to be scholars wedded to books, or specialists addicted to knowledge, then we shall be contributing to the destruction and misery of the world.

Though there is a higher and wider significance to life, of what value is our education if we never discover it? We may be highly educated, but if we are without deep integration

of thought and feeling, our lives are incomplete, contradictory and torn with many fears; and as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook on life, it has very little significance. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, p. 11]

33 [E]ducation, in the true sense, is the understanding of oneself, for it is within each one of us that the whole of existence is gathered.

What we now call education is a matter of accumulating information and knowledge from books, which anyone can do who can read. Such education offers a subtle form of escape from ourselves and, like all escapes, it inevitably creates increasing misery. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, p. 17]

34 Education is the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by the art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment. This completeness of achievement involves an artistic sense, subordinating the lower to the higher possibilities of the indivisible personality. Science, art, religion, morality, take their rise from this sense of values within the structure of being. Each individual embodies an adventure of existence. The art of life is the guidance of this adventure. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays,* Williams and Norgate, 1955, p. 61]

Related:
– Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?
– Do we really value education? Why do we value it?

4. Why is lifelong learning important?

1 [A]bove all, the greatest legacy of education is to encourage in our students a will to learn and to continue learning as personal circumstances change—in short, to promote a capacity for resiliency and self-renewal. This point was anticipated over a half century ago when John Dewey remarked that "the most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning." [*Experience and Education*, 1938] [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 3]

2 [N]o one can become fully educated in school, no matter how long the schooling or how good it is. Our concern with education must go beyond schooling.

The schooling of a people does not complete their education. Not even if the quality of schooling were improved to the utmost for all; not even if all who completed twelve years of compulsory basic schooling went on to optional advanced schooling in our colleges and universities and profited by it.

The simple fact is that educational institutions, even at their best, cannot turn out fully educated men and women. The age at which most human beings attend school prevents that. Youth itself is the most serious impediment—in fact, youth is an insuperable obstacle to being an educated person.

No one can be an educated person while immature. It would be a travesty to regard the degrees awarded by our colleges and universities as certifying the completion of education. It is all the more true of the high school diploma.

Only through the trials of adult life, only with the range and depth of experience that makes for maturity, can human beings become educated persons. The mature may not be as trainable as the immature, but they are more educable by virtue of their maturity.

Education is a lifelong process of which schooling is only a small but necessary part. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 9-10]

3 The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of education. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted by Laurence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas for Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, p. 96]

4 Schooling is the preparatory stage [of the educational process]; it forms the habit of learning and provides the means for continuing to learn after all schooling is completed. ...

Schooling, basic or advanced, that does not prepare the individual for further learning has failed, no matter what else it succeeds in doing. ...

Basic schooling in America does not now achieve this fundamental objective. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 10-11]

5 Bill Moyers: This revolution you're talking about—personal learning—it's not just for the young, is it?

Isaac Asimov: *No! That's a good point!* No, it's not just for the young. That's another trouble with education as we now have it. It is for the young, and people think of education as something that they can *finish*. And what's more, when they finish, that's a rite of passage into manhood. "I'm finished with school. I'm no more a child." And therefore anything that reminds you of school—reading books, having ideas, asking questions—that's kid's stuff. Now you're an adult, you don't do that sort of thing any more.

M: And in fact, like prison, the reward of school is getting out. Kids say, "When are you getting out?"

A: And every kid knows that. Every kid knows the only reason he's in school is because he's a kid and little and weak, and if he manages to get out early, if he drops out, why he's just a premature man.

M: ... I've talked to some of these dropouts, and they think ... they've become men because they're out of school. What's wrong with this?

A: Well, what's wrong with it is you have everybody looking forward to no longer learning, and you make them *ashamed* afterward of going back to learning. If you have

[a system of education using computers], then anyone, any age, can learn by himself, can continue to be interested. There's no reason then, if you enjoy learning, why you should stop at a given age. People don't stop things they enjoy doing just because they reach a certain age. ... They keep it up as long as they can if they enjoy it, and learning will be the same thing. The trouble with learning is that most people *don't* enjoy it because of the circumstances. Make it possible for them to enjoy learning, and they'll keep it up. [Bill Moyers' World of Ideas, Interview With Isaac Asimov, 1988, *YouTube*, uploaded by WL, 27 Jan 2022, 15:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beEVtutzl0Q]

6 "Once [students] have left [our educational institutions], we regard them as in some sense finished, neither capable of nor in need of further 'education.' ... Thus we avoid facing the most vivid truth of the new age: *no one will live all his life in the world into which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity.* ... Often, only a few months may elapse before something which previously was easily taken for granted must be unlearned or transformed to fit the new state of knowledge or practice. In this world, no one can 'complete an education.' ... [W]e need children *and* adolescents *and* young *and* mature *and* 'senior' adults, each of whom is learning at the appropriate pace and with all the special advantages and disadvantages of experience peculiar to his own age." [Margaret Mead, "Why is Education Obsolescent?", *Essays in Persuasion*, 1963]

In short, we need a learning society. [Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 161-162]

7 [F]ormal education, even for a privileged minority, has usually come to an end at the close of adolescence, if not earlier; and this has had an unfortunate consequence. The student has been surfeited with book learning at a stage of life at which he has not yet acquired the experience to take advantage of this, and he has then been starved for book learning at a later stage in which, if he had been given the opportunity, he could have made much more of it in the light of his growing experience. In the rich society of the future, we shall be able to afford to offer part-time adult education to every man and woman at every stage of grown-up life. [Arnold Toynbee, "Education in the Perspective of History," *The Teacher and the Taught*, quoted by Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 162-163]

8 Schools are ... supposed to foster a love of learning, but they actually teach many people that the classroom is a place of torment and humiliation. As a result, after we complete the minimum schooling we feel we absolutely must have, most of us steadfastly avoid the classroom for the rest of our lives. ...

Education needs to be spread out over one's life, not compacted into the childhood and teen years. ... Learning needs to be lifelong, and school—if it continues to exist at all—needs to provide people with the tools and inspiration they need to continue the learning process. [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, pp. 319-322]

9 Education must no longer be confined to the young. The young must not look forward to its completion, nor should the old look back on it as thankfully over. For all people, education must be made to seem a requirement of human life as long as life endures. Mental and creative vigor should accompany the physical vigor that medical advance will allow. Human beings can then remain "productive," in our present understanding of the word, until advanced age.

But is this possible? Will the time come when people so enjoy being educated that they will be willing to engage in it, on and off, all their long life? Why not, if they can learn what interests them and not what someone in authority says they ought to learn, interested or not? It will mean that we must turn education from fixed curricula into the direction of personal taste. [Isaac Asimov, "Our Future in Education," *The Tyrannosaurus Prescription*, Prometheus, 1989, p. 16]

10 In an ideal society, it would be not only children who were known to need an education. All adults would recognize that they inevitably required continuing education of an emotional kind and would remain active followers of a psychological curriculum. Schools devoted to emotional intelligence would be open for everyone, so that children would feel that they were participating in the early stages of a lifelong process. ...

We have collectively left to chance some of what it is most important to know; we have denied ourselves the opportunity to systematically transmit wisdom, reserving our belief in education to technical and managerial skills. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, p. 22]

11 "[T]he decline in the mental abilities of adults is functional; it results from disuse and not from organic degeneration." ...

If the body is to be kept healthy, alive, and in repair, it must have food and exercise regularly. What is true of the body is true of the mind. ... And the mind unexercised, like a muscle unused, atrophies, grows weak, becomes almost paralyzed. Hence, just as we know that we cannot support the life of the body this week on the basis of last week's feeding, so we ought to realize that we cannot support the life of the mind this week on last week's reading, much less last year's reading, or the reading done in college. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 214, 220]

12 Even if the individual has had the best possible liberal education in youth, interminable education through great books and the liberal arts remains his obligation; he cannot expect to store up an education in childhood that will last all his life. What he can do in youth is to acquire the disciplines and habits that will make it possible for him to continue to educate himself all his life. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 52, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

13 The trials of the citizen now surpass anything that previous generations ever knew. Private and public propaganda beats upon him from morning till night all his life long. If independent judgment is the *sine qua non* of effective citizenship in a democracy, then it must be admitted that such judgment is harder to maintain now than it ever has been before. It is too much to hope that a strong dose of education in childhood and youth can inoculate a man to withstand the onslaughts on his independent judgment that society conducts, or allows to be conducted, against him every day. For this, constant alertness and mental growth are required. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 53, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

14 If we are to expect the whole adult population to engage in liberal education, then the curriculum of schools, colleges, and universities should be constructed with this end in view. At present it is built upon the notion, which is unfortunately correct, that nobody is ever going to get any education after he gets out of school. Here we encounter the

melancholy fact that most of the important things that human beings ought to understand cannot be comprehended in youth.

Although I have known several astronomers who were contributing to the international journals before the age of sixteen, I have never known a child of any age who had much that was useful to say about the organization of human society or the ends of human life. The great books of ethics, political philosophy, economics, history, and literature do not yield up their secrets to the immature. In the United States, if these works are read at all, they are read in school and college, where they can be only dimly understood, and are never read again. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, pp. 53-54, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

15 And this is the point: every man's mind ought to keep working all his life long; every man's imagination should be touched as often as possible by the great works of imagination; every man ought to push toward the horizons of his intellectual powers all the time. It is impossible to have "had" a liberal education, except in a formal, accidental, immaterial sense. Liberal education ought to end only with life itself. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, pp. 75-76, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

16 According to the premise on which all of my own positions are based, man's highest purpose in life is the unfolding of his own personality, the realization, as nearly as possible, of his creative potential, that is, his emergence, his hatching, his becoming. Such achievement presupposes that the educational process will go on through all of adulthood, as well as during childhood. Indeed, school for the child, if it is to have meaning, is but the preparation for a dynamic, continuing process of education. The test of whether or not any primary and secondary educational system is meeting the requirements of true education is: Does it set the stage for adult learning? [Leonard Read, *Anything That's Peaceful: The Case for the Free Market*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1964, p. 213]

17 Jung thought that the achievement of optimum development of the personality was a lifetime's task which was never completed; a journey upon which one sets out hopefully toward a destination at which one never arrives.

> "The new attitude gained in the course of analysis tends sooner or later to become inadequate in one way or another, and necessarily so, because the flow of life again and again demands fresh adaptation. Adaptation is never achieved once and for all ... " [*The Transcendent Function: Collected Works*, VIII, 1969, p. 73] [Anthony Storr, *Solitude*, Free Press / Macmillan, 1988, pp. 197-198]

18

> [E]ducation is not merely schooling. It is a lifelong discipline of the individual by himself, encouraged by a reasonable opportunity to lead a good life. Education here is synonymous with civilization. A civilized community is better than a jungle, but civilization is a long slow process which cannot be "given" in a short course.
>
> No one in his senses would affirm that Schooling is the hope of the world. But to say this is to show up the folly of perpetually confusing Education with the work of the schools; the folly of believing against all evidence that by taking boys and girls for a few hours each day between the ages of seven and twenty-one, our teachers can "turn out" all the human products that we like to fancy when we are disgusted with ourselves and our neighbors. ...
>
> The whole mass of recrimination, disappointment, and dissatisfaction which this country is now suffering about its schools comes from using the ritual word "Education" so loosely and so frequently. It covers abysses of emptiness. Everybody cheats by using it, cheats others and cheats himself. The idea abets false ambitions. [Jacques Barzun, *Teacher In America*, 1945, Liberty Fund, 1981, pp. 9-10]

Related:
– Why should we take more responsibility for our education?

5. Why might it be difficult to assume the responsibility of education?

1 [T]eachers sometimes find that their willingness to let students make decisions is met with an apparent reluctance on the part of the students. This is really not so surprising, given that most of them have been conditioned to accept a posture of passivity at school and sometimes at home. After a few years of being instructed to do what you're told, it is disconcerting to be invited—much less expected—to take responsibility for the way things are.

This resistance takes three primary forms. The first is simply refusing: "That's your job to decide," students may protest. The second is testing: offering outrageous suggestions or responses to see if the teacher is really serious about the invitation to participate. The third is parroting: repeating what adults have said or guessing what this adult probably wants to hear. ...

It can be tempting to conclude that students are either unable to handle the responsibility of making decisions or unworthy of having it. But our challenge is to persevere. As Selma Wassermann has written, "I have heard teachers give it up after a single attempt, saying, 'Children cannot behave responsibly,' then remove all further opportunity for students to practice and grow in their responsible behavior. I have also heard teachers say, 'Children cannot think for themselves,' and proceed thereafter to do children's thinking for them. But these same teachers would never say, 'These children cannot read by themselves,' and thereafter remove any opportunity for them to learn to read." [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

2 It is not uncommon for students who have already gone through many years of [school] to feel uncomfortable when given the opportunity to help establish their own learning objectives. "Listen," one of them will say, "I don't want all this negotiation with you. Tell me what I need to learn."

So when I am teaching and hear such a comment, I first offer that student empathy for his discomfort. Then I suggest that he try to enjoy a new and radical approach that I am going to try. I say to the class, "I'd like to see a show of hands. How many of you are here

because you know what the subject is and you really want to learn it?" That will be Group A. "And how many of you are here because you're afraid of what's going to happen to you if you're not here?" That will be Group B.

Now, I'd say in almost all of the schools that I've been working in, about 3/4 of the students fall into Group B. After the show of hands, I suggest that we not proceed with class until everybody is in Group A, but that no one join Group A out of a sense of fear or obligation. The conversations that then emerge between the two groups not only concern the values of the course materials, but also the students' and my personal values. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, p. 82]

3 Often when [giving] talks or consultations about autonomy support, people tell us that their children, their students, or their employees don't want to have choice—that they want to be told what to do. When we hear such comments, they do ring true, at least to come extent, but we realize that if they are true it is because people have been pushed to that point by being overly controlled in the past. Remember that if you control people enough, they may begin to act as if they want to be controlled. As a self-protective strategy, they become focused outward—looking for clues about what the people in one-up positions expect of them, looking for what will keep them out of trouble. I have seen this, for example, in countless students who have come to ask what topic to use for their term papers. I typically respond with something like, "What interests you?" only to get the reply, "I don't know; what do you think I should write about?" ...

It seems that, to some degree at least, people adapt to being controlled and act as if they don't want the very thing that is integral to their nature—namely, the opportunity to be autonomous. They probably fear that they will be evaluated—perhaps even punished—if they make the wrong choice. [Edward Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 147-148]

4 If progressive education is so terrific, why is it still the exception rather than the rule? ... For starters ... progressive education is not only less familiar but also much harder to do, and especially to do it well. It asks a lot more of the students and at first can seem a burden to those who have figured out how to play the game in traditional classrooms—often succeeding by conventional standards without doing much thinking. It's also

much more demanding of teachers, who have to know their subject inside and out … [and] know a lot about pedagogy because no amount of content knowledge (say, expertise in science or English) can tell you how to facilitate learning. …

Progressive educators also have to be comfortable with uncertainty, not only to abandon a predictable march toward the "right answer" but to let students play an active role in the quest for meaning that replaces it. That means a willingness to give up some control and let students take some ownership, which requires guts as well as talent. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 22-28]

5 [P]rogressive education has an uphill journey because of the larger culture we live in. It's an approach that is in some respects inherently subversive, and people in power do not always enjoy being subverted. …

There is pressure to raise standardized test scores, something that progressive education manages to do only sometimes and by accident—not only because that isn't its purpose but also because such tests measure what matters least. …

And then … there are parents who have never been invited to reconsider their assumptions about education. As a result, they may be impressed by the wrong things, measured by signs of traditionalism—letter grades, spelling quizzes, heavy textbooks, a teacher in firm control of the classroom—and unnerved by their absence. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 28-29]

6 An implicit and sometimes explicit message of our forced schooling system is this: "If you do what you are told to do in school, everything will work out well for you." Children who buy into that message stop taking responsibility for their own education. They assume, falsely, that someone else has figured out what they need to do and know to become successful adults. … This attitude … , set up in childhood, may then persist for a lifetime. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 70]

7 [Students] may prefer to avoid unnecessary intellectual challenges such as those entailed by a more active, probing form of learning. ...

It's not just about how much effort is required. Students may become accustomed to classrooms in which they aren't expected (or even permitted) to have much of a say about what happens. ...

After all, from their first days in school they have been carefully instructed in what Philip Jackson famously called the "hidden curriculum": how to do what you're told and stay out of trouble. ...

Passivity, however, is not the only outcome of that training. We may also witness a diminution of interest in the life of the mind. Even those who are successful at playing the game of school and managing to stifle the urge to ask impertinent questions may find what they've been doing deeply unappealing on some level. If they haven't been exposed to a more active, more critical model of learning, they may well walk away from all intellectual pursuits. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 39-41]

8 In the name of education, we have increasingly deprived children of the time and freedom they need to educate themselves through their own means. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, pp. 19-20]

9 [I]n the majority of cases, the memory of our slavery [in school] becomes associated with the studies we pursued, and it is not till after repeated struggles, that those things can be rendered the objects of our choice, which were for so long a time the themes of compulsion. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, Garland, 1971, p. 83, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

10 One had to cram all this stuff into one's mind, whether one liked it or not. This coercion had such a deterring effect that, after I had passed the final examination, I found the consideration of any scientific problems distasteful to me for an entire year. [Albert Einstein, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, edited by Paul A. Schilpp, 1949,

MJF Books, 1970, p. 17, https://archive.org/details/albert-einstein-philosopher-scientist]

11 [Students'] enrollment in Summerhill represents a traumatic and sudden "decompression" in the scholastic environment. All the pressures associated with "going to school" are abruptly lifted, and their customary response is precisely what one might expect—they play hookey, refuse to attend any classes or do any work; they indulge to the full their child impulses to play and play all day long. Neill lets them.

Sooner or later, though, they voluntarily take up their studies again. This interval Neill appropriately calls "recovery time"; it sometimes goes on for months. "The recovery time is proportionate to the hatred their last school gave them. ..." [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, pp. 148-149]

12 Discipline, dogmatically imposed, and punishment create fear; and fear creates hostility. This hostility may not be conscious and overt, but it nevertheless paralyzes endeavor and authenticity of feeling. [Erich Fromm, Foreword, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, by A. S. Neill, Hart, 1960, https://archive.org/details/Summerhill-English-A.S.Neill]

13 [I]n an atmosphere where all discipline is thought evil, it will not occur to young people that voluntary submission of this sort is an essential of almost every kind of success. Difficult success as an ideal should be present to the mind of the young if they are not to become wayward or futile. [Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, 1932, Routledge Classics, 2009, p. 23]

14 I would like to give a brief portion of a recorded interview with a young woman, a graduate student, who had come for counseling help. ... During the interview one of the feelings she discovered was her great desire to be dependent, just to let someone else take over the direction of her life. She was very critical of those who had not given her enough guidance. She talked about one after another of her professors, feeling bitterly that none of them had taught her anything with deep meaning. Gradually she began to realize that part of the difficulty was the fact that she had taken no initiative in *participating* in these classes. ... [T]his young woman [had] begun to realize that perhaps she [was] partly responsible for the deficiencies in her own education. ...

Client: I mean, it seems to be really apparent to me that I *can't depend on someone else* to give me an education. (*Very softly*) I'll really have to get it myself.

Therapist: It really begins to come home—there's only one person that can educate you—a realization that perhaps nobody else *can give* you an education.

C: M-hm. (*Long pause—while she sits thinking*) I have all the symptoms of fright. (*Laughs softly*)

T: Fright? That this is a scary thing, is that what you mean?

C: M-hm. (*Very long pause—obviously struggling with feelings in herself*). ...

I hope that this illustration gives some sense of the strength which is experienced in being a unique person, responsible for oneself, and also the uneasiness that accompanies this assumption of responsibility. To recognize that "I am the one who chooses" and "I am the one who determines the value of an experience for me" is both an invigorating and a frightening realization. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, pp. 120-122]

15 [T]o know what one really wants is not comparatively easy, as most people think, but one of the most difficult problems any human being has to solve. It is a task we frantically try to avoid by accepting ready-made goals as though they were our own. Modern man is ready to take great risks when he tries to achieve the aims which are supposed to be "his"; but he is deeply afraid of taking the risk and the responsibility of giving himself his own aims. [Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941, Henry Holt & Co., 1994, pp. 251-252]

16 Neither pride nor self-esteem can be supported by the pursuit of secondhand values that do not reflect who we really are.

But does anything take more courage—is anything more challenging and sometimes frightening—than to live by our own mind, judgment, and values? Is not self-esteem a summons to the hero within us? [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 41-42]

17 The requirement to be self-evaluating and self-correcting demands an internal standard … it requires a theory or a philosophy of what makes something valuable … Our loyalty is transformed from adherence to a value to the process of originating or inventing what is valuable, a determination that heretofore has been made by the psychosocial surround. …

Educators seeking "self-direction" from their adult students are not merely asking them to take on new skills, modify their learning style, or increase their self-confidence. They are asking many of them to change the whole way they understand themselves, their world, and the relation between the two. They are asking many of them to put at risk the loyalties and devotions that have made up the very foundation of their lives. We acquire "personal authority," after all, only by relativizing—that is, only by fundamentally altering—our relationship to public authority. This is a long, often painful voyage, and one that, for much of the time, may feel more like mutiny than a merely exhilarating (and less self-conflicted) expedition to discover new lands. [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 169, 275]

Related:
– What are the effects of coercion in education?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?

6. How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn?

1 Who is to say what the student should learn? [Some argue] that it is the student himself who should say. His current interests should be the source of an effective educational policy. Certainly they will reflect his idiosyncrasies, and that is good, but how much can he know about the world in which he will eventually play a part? The things he is "naturally" curious about are of current and often temporary interest. ...

It must be admitted that the teacher is not always in a better position. Again and again education has gone out of date as teachers have continued to teach subjects which were no longer relevant at any time in the student's life. Teachers often teach simply what they know ... [or] what they can teach easily. Their current interests, like those of students, may not be a reliable guide.

Nevertheless, in recognizing the mistakes that have been made in the past in specifying what students are to learn, we do not absolve ourselves from the responsibility of setting educational policy. We should say, we should be willing to say, what we believe students will need to know, taking the individual student into account wherever possible, but otherwise making our best prediction with respect to students in general. Value judgments of this sort are not as hard to make as is often argued. ... [W]e are merely choosing a set of specifications which, so far as we can tell, will at some time in the future prove valuable to the student and his culture. Who is any more likely to be right? [B. F. Skinner, "The Free and Happy Student", *Phi Delta Kappan*, 55(1), 1973, pp. 13-16, https://education-consumers.org/free-happy-student-article/]

2 Many of the [progressive school] reforms were all to the good. But as everybody knows, the new conception of the child was utopian; it often went so far as to expect that he or she should decide what to study, supposedly in response to inner "needs." That was pure preposterism. It equated a desirable goal, the self-directing adult, with the child mind and will as yet undeveloped. This, again, was to skip the rudiments and jump to the full-blown achievement. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, U of Chicago P, 1991, p. 86]

3 The idea that inexperienced young people can judge in advance what will later turn out to be relevant over the next half-century or more of their life is part of a more general and romantic social vision. This vision underlies such things as denigration of authority derived from experience or specialized training. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, p. 92]

4 Permitting students an influence upon the formulation of academic policy would be tantamount to giving those with less knowledge and, therefore, less ability to advance the truth the same power as those who possess a greater knowledge and ability to do so. It would put men who have proved their excellence on a par with those who still must, and perhaps never will, prove it. Such a policy would topple the very tenets of education. [Gottfried Dietze, "Reason of University," *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, p. 114]

5 [I]nterest and adjustment have taken the place of discipline and cultivation as the watchwords of educational policy. The whole aim of education changes, for adjustment leads to the cult of success, the "ideal" of getting ahead by beating your neighbor. The emphasis on the interests of the student makes him a buyer instead of a patient, and the teacher becomes a salesman rather than a doctor prescribing the cure for ignorance and incompetence. It is the student who is the master under the elective system, which ... makes the young, i.e., the relatively ignorant and incompetent, choose their own road to learning according to the fickle interests of their immaturity. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 77]

6 As we have a tendency to underrate the intelligence of the young, we have a tendency to overrate their experience and the significance of the expression of interests and needs on the part of those who are inexperienced. Educators ought to know better than their pupils what an education is. If educators do not, they have wasted their lives. The art of teaching consists in large part of interesting people in things that ought to interest them, but do not. The task of educators is to discover what an education is and then to invent the methods of interesting their students in it. [Robert M. Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 49, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

7 Freedom from discipline, freedom to do nothing more than pursue the interests that the accident of birth or station has supplied may result in locking up the growing mind in its own whims and difficulties. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, p. 89, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

8 [There is a] difference, upon which I wish to insist, between exciting or indulging an interest and realizing it through its direction. ...

If you simply indulge this interest by letting the child go on indefinitely, there is no growth that is more than accidental. But let the child first express his impulse, and then through criticism, question, and suggestion bring him to consciousness of what he has done, and what he needs to do, and the result is quite different. [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, p. 41, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

9 [T]he teacher, as the member of the group having the riper and fuller experience and the greater insight into the possibilities of continuous development found in any suggested project, has not only the right but the duty to suggest lines of activity ... [John Dewey, "Progressive Education and the Science of Education," 1928, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 179]

10 [Student] evaluations often contain very useful information on those things which students are qualified to evaluate—the conscientiousness, clarity, and accessibility of professors, for example. The crucial problem, however, is that students are not qualified to evaluate what matters most, the quality of their education.

They can spot blatantly shoddy stuff, some of which can be found in even the most prestigious institutions. But to evaluate the real quality of a course which the student found challenging, interesting, and even inspiring, would require the student to know how that course compares to similar courses elsewhere, how much of what is vital to the subject was included or left out, and how much of a foundation the course provides for later and deeper work and thought in the same or related fields. These are the unknowns which are almost certain to remain unknown for years after the student's evaluation has been turned in. ...

Because students cannot evaluate what is crucial, someone else with more training and experience must do that evaluating. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 216-217]

11 What the most promising students imagine depends upon how they are sprung loose from their verbal and numerical dexterity routines, on the one hand, and from their demoralizing entertainments, on the other. Under the present egalitarian experience swindle, even the most promising student is likely to be confused about what he wants. Therefore, we are obliged not to give him what he wants; we can only give him what we think he should have. [Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death*, U of Chicago P, 1985, pp. 97-98]



12 Looking back over the educational objectives that professional educators determined would be helpful to me through the years, I would say they didn't predict very well. I do not see my life as having been significantly enriched by the majority of subjects that were offered. In retrospect, I can see many areas of learning I would have preferred to pursue that I believe would have served me better than those chosen for me. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 68-69]

13 The belief that children and even teenagers are incapable of rational decision-making and self-direction is a self-fulfilling prophecy. By confining children to school and other adult-directed school-like settings, and by filling their time with forced busywork, which serves no productive purpose, we deprive them of the time and opportunities they need to practice self-direction and responsibility. And so, children themselves, as well as their parents and teachers, come to think that children are incompetent. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 70]

14 Another issue is whether we could permit knowledge to be organized in and by the individual, or whether it is to be organized *for* the individual. Here teachers and

educators line up with parents and national leaders to insist that the pupil must be guided. He must be inducted into knowledge we have organized for him. He cannot be trusted to organize knowledge in functional terms for himself. As Herbert Hoover says of high school students, "You simply cannot expect kids of those ages to determine the sort of education they need unless they have some guidance." (*Time*, 2 Dec 1957) This seems so obvious to most people that even to question it is to seem somewhat unbalanced. Even a chancellor of a university questions whether freedom is really necessary in education, saying that perhaps we have overestimated its value. He says the Russians have advanced mightily in science without it, and implies that we should learn from them. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, pp. 293-294]

15 I believe that our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he shall know, what he shall do. It is chosen and foreordained, and he only holds the key to his own secret. By your tampering and thwarting and too much governing he may be hindered from his end and kept out of his own. Respect the child. Wait and see the new product of Nature. Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions. Respect the child. Be not too much his parent. Trespass not on his solitude.

But I hear the outcry which replies to this suggestion:—Would you verily throw up the reins of public and private discipline; would you leave the young child to the mad career of his own passions and whimsies, and call this anarchy a respect for the child's nature? I answer,—Respect the child, respect him to the end, but also respect yourself. Be the companion of his thought, the friend of his friendship, the lover of his virtue—but no kinsman of his sin. Let him find you so true to yourself that you are the irreconcilable hater of his vice and the imperturbable slighter of his trifling. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 10, 1909, pp. 141-142, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/emerson-the-works-of-ralph-waldo-emerson-vol-10-lectures-and-biographical-sketches]

16 A number of writers and teachers who resist giving children the chance to make decisions have justified their opposition by erecting an enormous straw man called "absolute freedom" and counterposing it to the status quo. ...

Not only is this a classic false dichotomy, but virtually every influential proponent of choice for students—as well as the programs that have put the idea into effect—proceeds from the assumption that there are indeed limits on the capacity and right of children to decide. The scary specter of laissez-faire liberty that shows up in the rhetoric of traditionalists is not easy to locate in the real world. Nearly every essay on education by John Dewey, the father of progressive schooling, stresses the importance of adult guidance and derides the idea of "leaving a child to his own unguided fancies." [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

17 I once participated in a psychotherapy class with Carl Rogers and learned a powerful lesson about the value of student involvement in setting learning objectives in the first ten minutes of the course.

Rogers began the class in a way that was unfamiliar to me. Instead of coming in and directing the learning process, he simply sat and waited for us to express what we wanted from the course. One of my classmates expressed dissatisfaction with Roger's non-directive teaching saying that he paid tuition to learn what Rogers had to offer and wanted to know why Rogers wasn't presenting information to us about psychotherapy. Rogers sincerely listened to the student's dissatisfaction and responded, "I believe that persons, regardless of how knowledgeable or creative they may be in a particular field, probably have no more than one or two ideas which are uniquely theirs. I could present to you the one or two concepts about psychotherapy for which I am given credit within five minutes. Then what would we do for the rest of the semester?"

Roger's statement apparently stimulated irritation within the student, who responded, "Yes, I agree that no one knows everything about a subject. But you know better than we do what has been done in the field and know better what is worth learning."

Again Rogers listened intently to what the student said and then responded, "It might be so that I have a better grasp of what has been done in the field of psychotherapy than you do. And maybe I have a better grasp of what is usually taught in this area. However, I am reluctant to decide by myself what is important for you to learn because I believe that the most important aspect in learning is to choose what is worth learning. If I alone make that choice, every day I would be reserving the most important part of learning for myself."

That lesson has stayed with me over the years and it helps me remember the value of bringing students in as partners in determining what is worth learning. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 81-82]

18 To involve students as partners in setting objectives is not as radical as it might seem at first. Whether or not the right of students to be partners in determining their objectives is recognized, the students still have the choice. It has been my experience that more will choose to pursue the objectives offered by teachers and administrators when these objectives are presented as recommended options (assuming, of course, that the objectives have life-enriching possibilities) than when they are presented as something that must be done. ...

I had an interaction with the principal of a high school in a large city in the United States who was extremely upset when I introduced the possibility of students being partners in decision-making about their learning. He protested that there were simply some choices that students weren't allowed to make. I asked for an example.

He said, "In this state it is the law that students attend school until they are 16 years old. Therefore, they have no choice as to whether or not they attend school."

I found this rather humorous. Why was I at his school in the first place? The board of education had hired me to work with the schools in their city that had a thirty percent or greater unexplained absent rate each day. They hoped that I might provide the staff of these schools with ideas for how to make education more appealing to the students. Though the principal claimed that the students could not choose whether or not to attend school, at least thirty percent of the students were aware they had that choice. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, p. 70]

19 I do not see student ignorance as just cause for the teacher unilaterally establishing objectives. If teachers believe strongly in a certain objective, I would like to see them responsible for educating students regarding its importance to the point that the students are willing to actively commit themselves to it. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-*

Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships, Puddle Dancer, 2003, p. 71]

20 [Our education] involves of course a serious misconception: instead of joining with one's equals in assuming the effort of persuasion and running the risk of failure, there is dictatorial intervention, based upon the absolute superiority of the adult ... [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, pp. 176-177]

21 The most desirable mode of education therefore, in all instances where it shall be found sufficiently practicable, is that which is careful that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded and accompanied by desire. The best motive to learn, is a perception of the value of the thing learned. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 1797, Garland, 1971, p. 78, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

22 I've always been bothered by the advice "make it relevant to the students," for two reasons. First, it often feels to me that it doesn't apply. Is the Epic of Gilgamesh relevant to students in a way they can understand right now? Is trigonometry? Making these topics relevant to students' lives will be a strain, and students will probably think it's phony. Second, if I can't convince students that some material is relevant, does that mean I shouldn't teach it? If I'm continually trying to build bridges between students' daily lives and their school subjects, the students may get the message that school is always about them, whereas I think there is value, interest, and beauty in learning about things that don't have much to do with me. I'm not saying it never makes sense to talk about things students are interested in. What I'm suggesting is that student interests should not be the main driving force of lesson planning. Rather, they might be used as initial points of contact that help students understand the main ideas you want them to consider, rather than as the reason or motivation for them to consider these ideas. [Daniel T. Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom*, John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p. 65]

23 Cultivating the full range of students' talents calls for a broader curriculum and a flexible range of teaching styles. This is not to suggest that students should study only the subjects they like or have a natural interest in. One of the roles of education is to

broaden and stretch the interests of the students, into areas for which they may not have a natural affinity: it is equally important that they feel their own natural abilities are properly engaged and valued. [Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds*: *The Power of Being Creative*, Capstone, 2011, p. 250]

24 People do not always learn from experience, but without it they do not learn at all. And experience alone is not enough; they must have not just experience but the ability to affect experience. If they think their choices and decisions make a difference to them, in their own lives, they will have every reason to try to choose and decide more wisely. But if what they think makes no difference, why bother to think? It is not just power, but impotence, that corrupts people. It gives them the mind and soul of slaves. It makes them indifferent, lazy, cynical, irresponsible, and, above all, stupid.

This has nothing to do with the sentimental belief that the average person or the mass of people have some mysterious Wisdom or would never make any mistakes. They would make plenty. People are generally ignorant and fallible. But on the whole, most of the time, every human being knows better than anyone else what he needs and wants, what gives him pleasure and joy or causes suffering and pain. Given real choices, people will choose for themselves better than others will choose for them. What is much more important, every human being is likely to know better than anyone else when he has made a mistake, when a choice he has made is working badly. Given a chance to correct that mistake, he is more likely to do so than someone else. [John Holt, *Escape From Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*, 1974, HoltGWS, 2013, pp. 99-100]

25 Responsibility is fostered by allowing children a voice and, wherever indicated, a choice in matters that affect them. *A deliberate distinction is made here between a voice and a choice.* There are matters that fall entirely within the child's realm of responsibility. In such matters the child should have a choice. There are matters affecting the child's welfare that are exclusively within our realm of responsibility. In such matters the child may have a voice, but not a choice. We make the choice, while helping the child accept the inevitable. What is needed is a clear distinction between these two realms of responsibility. ...

Children should be deliberately presented with many situations in which they make choices. The parents select the situations; the children make the choices. [Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, 1965, Three Rivers, 2003, pp. 89-90]

26 One of the central features of being autonomy supportive is providing choice, which entails sharing the authority or power of your one-up position. ... The most effective, autonomy-supportive managers and teachers allow their workers or students (whether individually or as a group) to play a role in decision making. ...

Naturally, students must learn to read, but why not let the group decide what to read? And why not let them talk about how to make the decision—by majority, by consensus, or by committee? The process of decision making is itself an important matter to learn about. ...

Even people who believe in the power of personal choice may still wonder whether offering choice is always best. The answer is undoubtedly no, and there are a few considerations that have been found to be useful in determining when it is most appropriate to include people in making decisions. One is whether the decision would be too stressful and conflict-promoting if others participated. ...

Another consideration is whether the particular decision is an appropriate one for people to decide, given their level of maturation. ... It is important for all youngsters to be given choices, but there are some issues that they are not ready to grapple with. ...

Simply stated, even though offering choices and allowing students, children, and employees to participate in decision making is motivationally (perhaps even morally) desirable, there are various circumstances where it may be impractical or disadvantageous. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 144-147]

27 Some parents who are familiar with research on brain development say, "How could I possibly trust my kid to be responsible for his education? His brain isn't mature yet." This is true at some level—his sense of judgment is still developing. But that's just it: he needs room to develop. Kids need responsibility more than they deserve it. For most adolescents, and even for younger kids, waiting until they are mature enough to get all their homework done and to turn it in on time before giving up the enforcer role means you've waited too long. As we mentioned, the parts of the prefrontal cortex that regulate emotions don't mature until you reach your early thirties, but we'd be hard pressed to find a parent who would want to wait that long to let their "kids" make their own decisions.

The brain develops according to how it's used. By giving your child the opportunity to make decisions for herself while still young, you will help her brain build the circuits that are necessary for resilience in the face of stress. A small experience of control over her circumstances, such as choosing her own clothing or decorating her own room, will activate her prefrontal cortex and condition it to respond effectively. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 36-37]

28 [T]he idea that we must wait until children are mature enough to handle responsibilities may set up a vicious circle: after all, it is experience with decisions that helps children become capable of handling them. [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

29 Most students are not my equal in experience or knowledge of literature and writing. But in some aspects of each them may be my superior. I will never know until I let them bring forth themselves full of their own experiences and ideas and feelings, as they are forced to let me bring forth myself. [Ken Macrorie, *Uptaught*, Hayden Book Company, 1970, p. 68]

30 Autonomy implies the ability and determination to regulate one's life by rules which one has accepted for oneself—presumably because the reasons for them are both apparent and convincing. ...

The development of autonomy is a slow and laborious business. Young people have to learn gradually to stand on their own feet and direct their own lives. They are not likely to do this if they are not encouraged to take responsibility and make choices about important matters within their limited experience; still less are they likely to do it if they are pitchforked into an anarchic situation in which they are told that they have to decide everything for themselves. Rationality requires a middle course between authoritarianism and permissiveness. Above all what is required is a rational attitude to and exercise of authority on the part of parents and teachers. [R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education,* George Allen & Unwin, 1966, pp. 197-198]

31 Few educators … would pose the alternatives in such stark terms: total prescription of goals by others, or total freedom for the student to pursue his own goals. … [F]reedom and structure are perfectly compatible; there can be, and indeed are, schools in which students have considerable freedom to set their own goals and follow their own interests, without the teachers in any way surrendering *their* responsibility to set external goals of their own. …

"From the start," the Plowden Committee firmly declares, "there must be teaching as well as learning: children are not 'free' to develop interests or skills of which they have no knowledge. They must have guidance from their teachers." Since what children are interested in is a function of their environment as well as of their native endowment, it is the teacher's responsibility to structure that environment in the best possible way, and to help it change and grow in response to each child's evolving interests and needs. [Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*, 1970, Vintage / Random House, 1971, pp. 199, 209]

Related:
– Why is trust and faith in young people important in education?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?

7. What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?

1 Ultimately, motivation for any venture needs to feel like it comes from inside. When it does, it feels "true"; when it comes from outside, it feels "phony." Working *primarily* to please others and to gain their approval takes time and energy away from children's real job of figuring out their authentic talents, skills, and interests. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure And Material Advantage Are Creating A Generation Of Disconnected And Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 11]

2 The key to whether people are living autonomously is whether they feel, deep within themselves, that their actions are their own choice. It is a psychological state of feeling free, and it is in the eye of the behaver, so to speak. But it requires that people take an honest look. It is quite possible for people to report feeling free, and even to "sort of" believe it, while deluding themselves. ...

[S]urely it is true that we can all feel within ourselves, at least intuitively, if we are autonomous. We can know (if it interests us to know) when our actions are self-initiated or self-endorsed; we can know when we are interested, engaged, and alive. ...

And just as surely, we know when we are being controlled. ... When people are either complying with or defying controls, they are not being autonomous, and they can know that. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 87]

3 Of course, it is possible to get people to do something. That is what rewards, punishments, and other instruments of control are all about. But the *desire* to do something, much less to do it well, simply cannot be imposed; in this sense, it is a mistake to talk about motivating other people. All we can do is set up certain conditions that will maximize the probability of their developing an interest in what they are doing and remove the conditions that function as constraints. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 181]

4 [K]now that your job isn't to motivate your kids at all. Rather, you want to help them foster their own sense of internal motivation. The end goal is not to get them to do well. It's for them to *want to do* well. ...

You could offer incentives ... or make threats ... [b]ut over the long run, carrots and sticks do not develop the kind of self-drive that leads to long-term success. ...

"Intrinsic motivation" is just a fancy way of saying behavior that's driven by curiosity, interest, the pursuit of challenge, or the desire to develop skills. It's the opposite of behavior inspired by rewards like grades or by the desire to avoid punishment. ...

Intrinsically motivated students study harder, pay more attention in class, ask more questions, get better grades, and are more likely to accomplish their goals. ... The challenge is that most schools rely on *extrinsic* motivation, which is why so many parents were tearing their hair our during COVID-19—especially when grades were taken out of the picture, as happened in many schools. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 96-97]

5 Robert Henri, perhaps the greatest American art teacher of the twentieth century, once captured the essence of being intrinsically motivated when he wrote: "The object of painting a picture is not to make a picture—however unreasonable this may sound. The picture, if a picture results, is a by-product and may be useful, valuable, interesting as a sign of what has passed. The object, which is back of every true work of art, is *the attainment of a state of being*, a high state of functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence." [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 21]

6 [Edward Deci and Richard Ryan] invite us to reconsider the casual way that we talk about the concept of motivation, as if it were a single thing that one possesses in a certain quantity. We want students to have more, so we try to "motivate" them—perhaps with the strategic use of rewards and punishments.

In fact, though, there are different types of motivation, and the type matters more than the amount. *Intrinsic* motivation consists of wanting to do something for its own sake —to read, for example, because it's exciting to lose oneself in a story. *Extrinsic* motivation exists when the task isn't really the point; one might read in order to get a

prize or someone's approval. Not only are these two kinds of motivation different—they tend to be inversely related. Scores of studies have shown that the more you reward people for doing something, the more they're apt to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 181-182]

7 Our sense of ourselves as basically competent and worthwhile, of being able to have an impact on the events that shape our lives—in short, our mental health—is in jeopardy when extrinsic motivation displaces intrinsic. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 95]

8 [*E*]*xtrinsic rewards reduce intrinsic motivation*. ...

"Intrinsic motivation is the prototypical form of self-determination," while "rewards in general appear to have a controlling significance to some extent and thus in general run the risk of undermining intrinsic motivation." [Deci and Ryan, 1990; Ryan et al., 1983] ...

"As rewards continue to co-opt intrinsic motivation and preclude intrinsic satisfaction, the extrinsic needs ... become stronger in themselves. Thus, people develop stronger extrinsic needs as substitutes for more basic, unsatisfied needs. ... They end up behaving as if they were addicted to extrinsic rewards." [Deci, 1978] [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, pp. 71, 79, 83]

9 The more we try to measure, control, and pressure learning from without, the more we obstruct the tendencies of students to be actively involved and to participate in their own education. Not only does this result in a failure of students to absorb the cognitive agenda imparted by educators, but it also creates deleterious consequences for the affective agendas of schools [that is, how students feel about learning]. ... Externally imposed evaluations, goals, rewards, and pressures seem to create a style of teaching and learning that is antithetical to quality learning outcomes in school, that is, learning characterized by durability, depth, and integration. [Ryan and Stiller, "The social contexts of internalization: Parent and teacher influences on autonomy, motivation and

learning," 1991, quoted by Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 150]

10 [N]o growth to freedom occurs except by intrinsic motivation. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 61-62]

11 [E]ncouraging intrinsic learning goals requires that students have considerable freedom —freedom to set their own leaning objectives within reasonable limits and then to decide how best to achieve them. Such freedom requires the monitoring of one's own progress toward these goals, and the ability to plan. ... [Students] must also be trained in the skills of intellectual self-discipline that form the essential complement to freedom. ...

[T]he ability to plan is a part of motivation. Indeed, ... we will consider the possibility that *motives* are actually just *plans* by a different name. This suggests that teaching students to be more planful will actually enhance their willingness to learn, and for the right reasons. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 20-21, 42]

12 [S]ometimes tangible rewards are needed to keep students involved long enough, especially in the early stages of learning, for the process of self-improvement to take on satisfying properties of its own. But extrinsic rewards should be used sparingly and withdrawn as soon as skills are adequately mastered. ... [T]eachers should rely on extrinsic rewards only as absolutely necessary, and no more: the less powerful the extrinsic controls employed by teachers, the more likely students will be to internalize what they learn and apply it spontaneously without being prompted to do so. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 146]

13 [Social psychologist Mark Lepper's principle called "minimal sufficiency"] states that the most effective methods of permanently improving a child's behavior are those that are applied with just enough coercion or reward to engage the child in the new behavior but not so much coercion or reward that the child finds this to be the most memorable part of the experience. In other words, the external incentives that the adult provides must be *minimally sufficient* to change the child's behavior without being more salient

in themselves than the standards that the adult is trying to promote. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 178, 183]

14 Simply put, children cannot learn wholly on their own: for intellectual growth, they need to be instructed, prodded, challenged, corrected, and assisted by people who are trying to teach them something. ... [L]earning is more than a matter of realizing one's incipient inner intimations. It requires an external structure of reality, of information, of communication, and of social supports. Above all, it requires an organized presentation of a systematic body of knowledge. ...

The motivation to learn cannot come solely from within. It is built on an amalgamated foundation of inner and outer inducements—including a teacher's expectations, support, encouragement, and grades. In recent years, the phrase "intrinsic motivation" has attained almost biblical status. ... Educators everywhere believe that school materials must intrinsically motivate children if children are to benefit from them. Once again, however, the facts are not that simple. Extrinsic motivation—goading children through rewards, pressure, and other incentives—also has its place in real-world learning. School programs that rely on students' intrinsic motivation alone cannot teach students to work through the inevitable frustrations and drudgery that eventually accompanies any pursuit. In short, such an approach cannot teach children the work habits that they need for sustained accomplishment and true mastery. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 105-106]

15 [A]ll the work that [Richard] Ryan and I have done indicates that *self*-motivation, rather than external motivation, is at the heart of creativity, responsibility, healthy behavior, and lasting change. External cunning or pressure (and their internalized counterparts) can sometimes bring about compliance, but with compliance come various negative consequences, including the urge to defy. Because neither compliance nor defiance exemplifies autonomy and authenticity, we have continuously had to confront an extremely important—seemingly paradoxical—question: How can people in one-up positions, such as health-care providers or teachers, motivate others, such as their patients or students, who are in one-down positions, if the most powerful motivation, leading to the most responsible behavior, must come from within—if it must be internal to the self of the people in the one-down positions?

In fact, the answer to this important question can be provided only when the question is reformulated. The proper question is not, "how can people motivate others?" but rather, "*how can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?*" [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 9-10]

16 As socializing agents—parents, teachers, and managers—it is our job to encourage others to do many things they might find boring but that allow them to become effective members of society. Actually, our job goes beyond just encouraging them to do the activities; it's more challenging than that. *The real job involves facilitating their doing the activities of their own volition, at their own initiative, so they will go on doing the activities freely in the future when we are no longer there to prompt them.* [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 92-94]

17 The truth is that there are no techniques that will motivate people or make them autonomous. Motivation must come from within, not from techniques. It comes from their deciding they are ready to take responsibility for managing themselves.

When people are really ready to change for their own personal reasons, and when they are willing to face and cope with the myriad feelings—anxiety, inadequacy, rage, terror, or loneliness—that underlie their maladaptive behaviors, they will have the motivation for change. Once that has happened, various techniques may be useful for them, but without a true resolve, without reasons for change that are personally important, techniques will not help. When people put stock in techniques as something that will change them, they are expressing an external locus of causality rather than an internal one; they are holding the misguided belief that being controlled rather than autonomous is the means for bringing about meaningful, personal change. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 194]

18 How quickly we contribute to students learning that the most important part of schooling is not the development of Life-Enriching skills and information, but earning positive judgments and avoiding negative ones.

> Such learning is critical to maintaining Domination systems in which work is done to gain rewards and avoid punishments. Rewards and punishments are not necessary when people see how their efforts are contributing to their own well-being and the well-being of others. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 13-14]

19 > In order for objectives to be established mutually, it is necessary for teachers to clearly communicate how the lives of students will be enriched by pursuing the objectives they choose. This is critical, because Life-Enriching Education requires that actions of teachers and students be motivated by the intention to enrich life and not by fear of punishment or hope for an extrinsic reward (a high grade or a college scholarship, for example), and certainly not simply by some edict that implies that people in authority know what is good for us. ...
>
> The process of the teachers and students mutually establishing objectives might begin with the teacher recommending an area of study and explaining the needs that the teacher predicts would be fulfilled by pursuing this area of study. If the student sees the value of the proposed course of study and agrees, mutual objectives have been reached. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 68-69]

20 > Many teachers feel helpless when told not to motivate students using punishment, reward, guilt, or shame, or a sense of obligation to duty. What's left, they ask? What is left are connections between people and a desire to contribute to one's own self-fulfillment and the well-being of others. ... We share what is valuable to us, why we would encourage others to consider it, and listen to their feelings and needs in return. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 112-113]

21 > [Johnmarshall] Reeve [a researcher studying educational psychology] suspected students' motivation was directly related to whether their core needs were met,

including the need for some autonomy and the ability to ask questions and assert their interest. ...

Students [who received autonomy-supportive teaching] were more motivated and engaged. They were happier (increased positive self-concept and increased positive emotions and well-being). They were kinder (increased prosocial behavior and less problematic relationships). They achieved more (increased learning, skill development, and school achievement). [Reeve et al., "Enhancing Students' Engagement by Increasing Teachers' Autonomy Support."] ... Students knew that their teachers cared about their interests, that their opinions mattered, and that they had choice in how they learned. ... They were not pawns in their learning but authors of it. ...

Having some autonomy to make choices, students begin to ask themselves key questions like "What assignment do I want to do?" And when a teachers asks, "What did you like about the assignment?" it's a signal of respect but also an inquiry into interests.

The act of answering these questions builds decision-making abilities ... The autonomy that allows the questions in the first place elicits motivation and energy. ... Students can take ownership because there is a choice, can set goals because they have a say, and can seek and overcome a challenge because it's worthwhile—it's their goal, too. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 116-119]

22 [Robert] White's theorizing suggests that there is a second important psychological need —beyond autonomy—that underlies intrinsically motivated behavior. People, impelled by the need to feel competent, might engage in various activities simply to expand their own sense of accomplishment. When you think about it, the curiosity of children—their intrinsic motivation to learn—might, to a large extent, be attributed to their need to feel effective or competent in dealing with their world. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 65]

23 Above all, schools must address the *Why* question with students about all that they do. Why do people study academic subjects? Why is it important to read and write? ... Why are you, and your fellow students, here at all?

Every part of the curriculum should be taught with the *Why* question squarely in the foreground. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 172-173]

24 In essence, motivation consists of pointing to the concretes in reality that the child will be dealing with and showing him how he can deal with them better if he learns what you are teaching. That is the only way you can anchor a whole subject from the outset. You make every subject part of the skill of dealing with reality, as against "I just learned this stuff because someone told me to." Learning the latter way is a guarantee of having the subject float in the child's mind, however well it is taught, and however many eloquent examples the teacher gives, because the whole subject, if unmotivated, is disconnected from his life in reality. ...

The principle of motivation is this: show them that the skills they themselves want to have or might want to have depend on mastering this subject. The "might want" is critical. There are many things they do not necessarily want now but they might want some day. ...

I want to stress that motivation is not simply something you provide at the first class or the opening discussion. It must be continuous. You have to persistently refer back to your motivation throughout the entire subject matter. [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, pp. 17, 20]



25 You do not teach values by abstract lecturing, but by proper concretes. And the first step in teaching the proper values is by the kind of motivation you endorse and rely on. To motivate a class is to specify values that you are going to achieve. You actually encourage certain values in students by the kinds of motivation you offer. [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, p. 18]

26 [T]here are several gods our students are presently asked to serve. ...

> [T]he first narrative ... may properly go by the name of the god of Economic Utility. ... If you will pay attention in school, and do your homework, and score well on tests, and behave yourself, you will be rewarded with a well-paying job when you are done. ...
>
> The story tells us that we are first and foremost economic creatures, and that our sense of worth and purpose is to be found in our capacity to secure material benefits. ...
>
> [T]he god of Economic Utility is coupled with another god, one with a smiling face and one that provides an answer to the question, If I get a good job, then what?
>
> I refer here to the god of Consumership, whose basic moral axiom is expressed in the slogan "Whoever dies with the most toys, wins"—that is to say, goodness inheres in those who buy things; evil in those who do not. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 27-35]

27 > To almost everyone, ... education is a means to an end. For students, that end is a good job. Students want the credentials that will help them get ahead. They want the certificate that will give them access to Wall Street, or entrance into law or medical or business school. And how can we blame them? America values power and money, big players with big bucks. When we raise our children, we tell them in multiple ways that what we want most for them is success—material success. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 53-54]

28 > Too often ... the schools, through reliance upon the spur of competition and the bestowing of special honors and prizes, only build up and strengthen the disposition that makes an individual when he leaves school employ his special talents and superior skill to outwit his fellows without respect for the welfare of others. [John Dewey, "The Need for a Philosophy of Education," 1934, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 11]

29 > It is doubtful whether we can achieve free minds by concentrating our efforts on making our pupils economically independent. We want free minds which will seek the goods in their order. Those who seek primarily their private economic interests may become enslaved to them and try to enslave the rest of us as well. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, p. 90, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

30 > The question is not, Does or doesn't public schooling create a public? The question is, What kind of public does it create? A conglomerate of self-indulgent consumers? Angry, soulless, directionless masses? Indifferent, confused citizens? Or a public imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, a respect for learning, and tolerance? The answer to this question has nothing whatever to do with computers, with testing, with teacher accountability, with class size, and with the other details of managing schools. The right answer depends on two things, and two things alone: the existence of shared narratives and the capacity of such narratives to provide an inspired reason for schooling. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 18]

Related:

– How can we foster self-directed learning in others?
– What is "signaling" and why is it an important concept in education?
– What are the effects of coercion in education?

8. How should we think about and spend our leisure?

1 Material success in the absence of struggle is a dangerous temptation to inactivity. ... The citizens of an affluent society, in exchange for almost nothing, enjoy an abundance of goods and leisure as well. They must not stop there, but go on to learn the art of investing their time and things so that material blessings shall be a means of enriching other sectors of their lives. The critical task today is maintaining intellectual, moral, and spiritual fitness in the face of luxury. This is a challenge of a sort that mankind has never faced before; it is the sink or swim problem affluence poses. [Leonard Read, *Then Truth Will Out*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1971, pp. 87-88]

2 [H]umanity's struggle toward material security will only be worthwhile if we understand and find ways to attenuate the psychological afflictions that appear to continue into, and are sometimes directly fostered by, conditions of abundance. The problems of the thirty or so rich countries described as First World are the ones that the whole of our species will, according to current trajectories, be facing in 300 years' time. ... First World problems aren't an unnecessary oddity. They are a form of time travel. They are a glimpse into what will one day bedevil all humankind—unless we learn to view them as more than the tantrums of the spoilt. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, pp. 15-16]

3 The enjoyment of a high standard of living, however desirable, still leaves more to be desired. The external, physical, material conditions of a good human life, necessary as they are, remain by themselves insufficient. They must be put to such use by the individual that the quality of his or her life is enriched internally as well as externally. ...

[A] poorly schooled population will not be able to put to good use the opportunities afforded by the achievement of the general welfare. Those who are not schooled to enjoy the blessings of a good society can only despoil its institutions and corrupt themselves. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 73, 79]

4 Leisure has long been associated with artistic, literary, and scientific productivity. ... But leisure itself does not necessarily lead to art, literature, or science. Special cultural

conditions are needed. Those who are concerned with the survival of their culture will therefore look closely at the contingencies which remain when the exigent contingencies in daily life have been attenuated. ...

The enormous potential of those who have nothing to do cannot be overlooked. They may be productive or destructive, conserving or consuming. They may reach the limits of their capacities or be converted into machines. ...

Leisure is one of the great challenges to those who are concerned with the survival of a culture ... [B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Bantam, 1971, pp. 169-172]

5 The gift of leisure may be abused by people who have had no experience of it. Yet the creative use of leisure by a minority of the leisured minority in process of civilization has been the mainspring of all human progress beyond the primitive level. In our still archaic industrial society, leisure continues to be thought of, by all but a privileged minority, in its negative aspect of "unemployment" in gainful labor ... The Greeks had a truer vision in seeing in leisure the greatest of all human goods. [Arnold Toynbee, "Education in the Perspective of History," *The Teacher and the Taught*, quoted by Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 162-163]

6 [L]eisure in Greek is *skole*, and in Latin *scola*, the English "school." The word used to designate the place where we educate and teach is derived from a word which means "leisure." [Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 1948, translated by Alexander Dru, Mentor-Omega / New American Library, 1963, pp. 20-21]

7 The chief ingredients of a life well lived are the activities of learning and of creative production. These two things—learning and creativity—constitute leisure, in sharp contradistinction to play, recreation, and idling as other ways in which human beings fill their free time. A good human life is one that is enriched by as much leisure as one can cram into it ... [s]uch things as thinking or learning, reading or writing, conversation or correspondence, love and acts of friendship, political activity, domestic activity, artistic and esthetic activity. ...

The good life *depends on* labor, but it *consists of leisure*. ... Leisure activities are the ends for which wealth is the means. ... Leisure activities constitute not mere living but living

well. They are what Aristotle calls "virtuous activities" or the "goods of the soul." [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 88-89, 97, 108]

8 What is a good life? Put another way, what makes life good? ... Of course, there are many answers, or parts of answers: love and friendship, creative work and enjoying the creativity of others, learning (that is, growing in our understanding of some sliver of reality), or learning new skills, doing things that are hard or beautiful ... and of course there is also compassion. There is so much suffering in the world, and relieving some portion of it is one of the good things we get to do here.

However there is a deeper answer to the question of what makes life good. ... When I talk about this I tend to talk about meditation. ... The question about a good life becomes: What is there to notice, right now, that matters? What's available to your powers of attention, in this moment, that is important—or even sacred? ... There is a freedom to be found here in recognizing what it's like to be you, what life is *actually* like in each moment, rather than what you *think* it's like, or hope it's like, or fear it's like. Meditation is simply noticing what is real, as a matter of experience. [Sam Harris, "A New Year's Message from Sam (Episode #397)," *YouTube*, uploaded by Sam Harris, 1 Jan. 2025, 10:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itEw0klxBWM]

9 Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a week-end or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul ...

Leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality ... Silence, as it is used in this context, does not mean "dumbness" of "noiselessness"; it means more nearly that the soul's power to "answer" to the reality of the world is left undisturbed. For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation. [Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 1948, translated by Alexander Dru, Mentor-Omega / New American Library, 1963, pp. 40-41]

10 [L]eisure is an inward space whose use could count as the culmination of all our endeavors. ...

[T]he kind of leisure that functions as an ultimate goal of living does not require vast estates and the life of a country gentleman. It can be taken in a moment, or in a long pause; it can fruitfully coexist with certain kinds of manual labor. The great books movement that for a time shaped American intellectual culture began among working people, in workmen's institutes where people who toiled with their hands sought to develop themselves as human beings with rich inner lives. ...

That said, under certain circumstances leisure does not exist, and so its use is impossible. ...

Leisure can be destroyed in appalling working conditions designed by others. ... It can be destroyed by compulsive behaviors that consume all of our thought and awareness. Leisure can also be destroyed by our own choices. [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, pp. 36-40]

11 Of all people, they alone who give their time to philosophy are at leisure, they alone really live. For it's not just their own lifetime that they watch over carefully, but they annex every age to their own; all the years that have gone before are added to their own. Unless we prove most ungrateful, those most distinguished founders of hallowed thoughts came into being for us, and for us they prepared a way of living. We are led by the work of others into the presence of the most beautiful treasures, which have been pulled from darkness and brought to light. From no age are we debarred, we have access to all; and if we want to transcend the narrow limitations of human weakness by our expansiveness of mind, there is a great span of time for us to range over. [Lucius Annaeus Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life," ~49 AD, translated by Gareth D. Williams, https://archive.org/details/SenecaOnTheShortnessOfLife]

12 [Leisure] is not an immediate outgrowth of wealth and luxury. It emerges from a wealthy society that has been disciplined, ... that trains its young for what really matters. Intellectual development requires a chosen asceticism, a conscious rejection of available luxury. It marks out a way between rustic simplicity and the decadence of wealth. ...

[I]f [wealth] is pursued as an end rather than as a condition for or means to other good things, it chews up and destroys the other human goods. [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, pp. 123-124]

13 [I]n order to gain a clear notion of leisure we must begin by setting aside the prejudice—our prejudice—that comes from overvaluing the sphere of work. In his well-known study of capitalism Max Weber quotes the saying, that "one does not work to live; one lives to work," which nowadays no one has much difficulty in understanding: it expresses the current opinion. We even find some difficulty in grasping that it reverses the order of things and stands them on their head.

But what ought we to say to the opposite view, to the view that "we work in order to have leisure"? ... To those who live in a world of nothing but work, in what we might call the world of "total work," it presumably sounds immoral, as though directed at the very foundations of human society. ...

Of course specialized and professional work is *normal*, *the* normal way in which men play their part in the world; "work" is the normal, the working day is the ordinary day. But the question is: whether the world, defined as the world of work, is exhaustively defined; can man develop to the full as a functionary and a "worker" and nothing else; can a full human existence be contained within an exclusively workaday existence? [Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 1948, translated by Alexander Dru, Mentor-Omega / New American Library, 1963, pp. 20-21, 35-36]

14 [V]ocational training is training for work or labor; it is specialized rather than general; it is for an extrinsic end; and ultimately it is the education of slaves or workers. And from my point of view it makes no difference whether you say slaves or workers, for you mean that the worker is a man who does nothing but work ...

Liberal education is education for leisure; it is general in character; it is for an intrinsic and not an extrinsic end; and, as compared with vocational training, ... liberal education is the education of free men. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 96]

15 Though schoolwork and homework are study and are therefore a part of learning and belong to leisure activity, we call them "work." Why? ... I think we call them "work," ... not because pain is involved in them but because we do them under some obligation, under some compulsion. ...

[L]abor is that activity which is required, is compulsory, for all men in order for them to live or subsist and which therefore must be extrinsically compensated ...

Leisure activities, in sharp distinction from labor or work, consist of those things that men do because they are desirable for their own sake. They are self-rewarding, not externally compensated, and they are freely engaged in. ...

Play may be one of two things. It may be biologically useful like sleep, just as vacations and recreational activities are biologically useful. Just as sleep is a way of washing away fatigue, so a certain amount of play or vacation or recreation has the same kind of biological utility in the recuperation of the body. ... Beyond that you have licentiousness ... [which] is a misuse of leisure. ...

We see, furthermore, that the very same activities can be either labor or leisure, according to the conditions under which they are performed. ... Manual work can be leisure if it is work done for the sake of the art that is involved and for the cultivation of an artist. It is labor if it is done for compensation. ...

Not only can the same activity be both leisure and work; but even play, or things that I would call play, can be work for some people. Professional football is work to those who play it. Think also of all the persons whose working lives are spent in the amusement business. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 99-103]

16 [T]here is at least the beginning of an order for the parts of life ... sleep and its adjunct activities and play as recreation must be for the sake of work; and work must be for the sake of leisure. Earning a living, in short, and keeping alive must be for the sake of living well. Many of the obvious disorders of human life result from improper understanding of the order of these parts—for example, sleeping for its own sake ... ; working as an end in itself, which is a complete perversion of human life; working for the sake of play, which is certainly a misconception of leisure; or free time as time to kill in pleasure seeking. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 105]

17 We mistake leisure for idleness, and work for creativity. Of course, work *may* be creative. But only when informed by leisure. Work is the means of life; leisure the end. Without the end, work is meaningless—a means to a means to a means ... and so on forever ... Leisure is not the cessation of work, but work of another kind, work restored to its human meaning, as a celebration and a festival. [Roger Scruton, Introduction, *Leisure:*

The Basis of Culture, by Josef Pieper, St. Augustine's Press, 1998, p. 14, https://ballyheaparish.com/resources/Leisure-The-Basis-of-Culture-copy-2.pdf]

18 What was new in modern society was that men came to be driven to work not so much by external pressure but by an internal compulsion, which made them work as only a very strict master could have made people do in other societies. ...

Against external compulsion there is always a certain amount of rebelliousness which hampers the effectiveness of work or makes people unfit for any differentiated task requiring intelligence, initiative, and responsibility. The compulsion to work by which man was turned into his own slave driver did not hamper these qualities. ... There is no other period in history in which free men have given their energy so completely for the one purpose: work. [Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941, Henry Holt & Co., 1994, pp. 93-94]

19 The society of laboring and achievement is not a free society. It generates new constraints. ... In this society of compulsion, everyone carries a work camp inside. This labor camp is defined by the fact that one is simultaneously prisoner and guard, victim and perpetrator. ...

[B]urnout represents the pathological consequence of *voluntary* self-exploitation. [Byun-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, 2010, translated by Erik Butler, Stanford UP, 2015, pp. 19, 44]

20 Now [high society] valorizes industry and despises leisure. As every rich person knows, when an acquaintance asks "How are you?" the correct answer is "So busy." ...

The inner logics of meritocratic competition and reward—and the social economy of meritocratic status—tend inexorably toward alienated self-exploitation.

Meritocrats therefore suffer as well as gain from rising economic inequality and never recover the full measure of aristocratic advantage, and superordinate workers are not masters of the universe so much as high-class conscripts. ...

All the income and wealth that meritocracy confers on superordinate workers cannot promote freedom or flourishing. [Daniel Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap: How*

America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite, Penguin Random House, 2019, pp. 4, 194, 45]

21 Life in America now is all too often one of two things. Often it is work. People work very hard indeed—often it takes two incomes to support a family, and few are the full-time professional jobs that currently require only forty hours a week. And when life is not work, what is it? When life isn't work, it is play. That's not hard to understand. People are tired, stressed, drained: They want to kick back a little. That something done in the rare off-hours should be strenuous seems rather unfair. Frost talked about making his vocation and his avocation one, and about his work being play for mortal stakes: For that sort of thing, assuming it was ever possible, there is no longer time. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 173-174]

22 Most people think that the only way they can fill time is sleeping, working, and playing. That is wrong. A life built upon only those three things is really an aborted life. ...

So we come to the fourth kind of activity, leisure-work. ... The leisure worker learns, grows morally, intellectually, and spiritually. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 250-252]

23 The most prevalent of all human ills are these two: a man's discontent with the work he does and the necessity of having to kill time. ...

I say that the mark of a happy man is also the sure sign that he is liberally educated, namely, that you never find him trying to kill time. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 108]

24 [L]eisure stands opposed to the exclusive ideal of work *qua* social function. A break in one's work, whether of an hour, a day or a week, is still part of the world of work. It is a link in the chain of utilitarian functions. The pause is made for the sake of work and in order to work, and a man is not only refreshed *from* work but *for* work. Leisure is an altogether different matter; it is no longer on the same plane; it runs at right angles to work ... And therefore leisure does not exist for the sake of work—however much strength it may give a man to work; the point of leisure is not to be a restorative, a pick-

me-up, whether mental or physical; and though it gives new strength, mentally and physically, and spiritually too, that is not the point. [Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 1948, translated by Alexander Dru, Mentor-Omega / New American Library, 1963, p. 43]

25 [M]ore leisure exists today, *per capita*, than ever existed before. Though industrial production has produced this abundance of leisure, industrialism as such has made all men servants of productivity; and, when productivity itself is regarded as the highest good, leisure is debased to the level of play or idleness, which can be justified only as recreation. ... Leisure loses its meaning when industrial society reduces it to an incidental by-product of productivity. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 107]

26 Is it possible, from now on, to maintain and defend, or even to reconquer, the right and claims of leisure, in face of the claims of "total labour" that are invading every sphere of life? Leisure, it must be remembered, is not a Sunday afternoon idyll, but the presence of freedom, of education and culture, and of that undiminished humanity which views the world as a whole. [Joseph Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, 1948, translated by Alexander Dru, Mentor-Omega / New American Library, 1963, p. 46]

27 If leisure and political power require [liberal] education, everybody in America now requires it, and everybody where democracy and industrialization penetrate will ultimately require it. If the people are not capable of acquiring this education, they should be deprived of political power and probably of leisure. Their uneducated political power is dangerous, and their uneducated leisure is degrading and will be dangerous. If the people are incapable of achieving the education that responsible democratic citizenship demands, then democracy is doomed ... [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 18, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

28 To ... make active, competent, and initiating citizens who can produce a community culture and a noble recreation, we need a very different education than the schooling that we have been getting. ...

On the whole, the education must be voluntary rather than compulsory, for no growth to freedom occurs except by intrinsic motivation. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 61-62]

29 It takes application, a fine sense of value, and a powerful community-spirit for a people to have serious leisure, and this has not been the genius of the Americans. [Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, Vintage, 1960, p. 33]

30 To be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last product of civilization, and at present very few people have reached this level. [Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 1930, George Allen & Unwin, 1932, p. 208]

31 Few members of contemporary society, whatever their age, know how to organize their leisure to serve their own ends ... Society depends on the school, as it later depends on the job ... to give individuals a sense that there is some place they ought to be and something they are supposed to be doing. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage /Random House, 1965, p. 251]

32 The first message that S-chools, like any other compulsory institution, send to the people who attend them is a message of distrust and contempt: If we didn't make you come here you wouldn't learn anything, you'd just waste your time, spend the whole day playing basketball or watching TV or making trouble, you'd hang out on the streets, never do anything worthwhile, grow up to be a bum. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 171-172]

33 Human beings appear to be a species of animal who are not particularly happy or alive when they are inert, except for short periods of time between their exertions. Although they become tired and tense when they are ceaselessly active, they just as easily become bored and listless when they are constantly at rest. [Albert Ellis and Robert Harper, *A Guide to Rational Living*, 1961, Wilshire, 1970, p. 173]

34 Recreation and relaxation, though admirable and necessary as recuperation from exertion of any kind, can hardly form the steady and exclusive diet of rational animals.

[Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, p. 164]

35 What is the difference between a relaxing activity and the form of leisure that constitutes the end of one's life? The difference is simply that we would not judge a cookout or the beach holiday or card playing to be the pinnacle of life. These activities are lovely, human, and necessary, but they do not draw on our highest capacities. Art, music, serious conversation, and loving service, by contrast, bring out the best in us. They are goals toward which we strive; they are engines for limitless personal growth. The difference between leisure and recreation will be subtle ... Any minimally happy life must include recreation, but what really matters is far more demanding. [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, pp. 42-43]

36 The best moments of our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times ... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and meaningful. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, quoted by William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 115]

37 Alone though they may be much of the time, [educated people] are not so much to be pitied as the sociable creatures who must have "people around" or a movie to go to. For the educated person has appropriated so much of other men's minds that he can live on his store like the camel on his reservoir. Everything can become grist to his mill, including his own misery—if he is miserable—for by association with what he knows, everything he enjoys or endures has echoes and meanings and suggestions ad infinitum. This is in fact the test and the use of a human being's education, that he finds pleasure in the exercise of his mind.

Pascal once said that all the trouble in the world was due to the fact that man could not sit still in a room. He must hunt, flirt, gamble, chatter. That is man's destiny and it is not to be quarreled with, but the educated man has through the ages found a way to convert passionate activity into silent and motionless pleasure. He can sit in a room and

not perish. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, U of Chicago P, 1991, p. 216]

38 Although ... people generally long to leave their places of work and get home, ready to put their hard-earned free time to good use, all too often they have no idea what to do there. Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because ... they have built-in goals, feedback, rules, and challenges ... Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed. Hobbies that demand skill, habits that set goals and limits, personal interests, and especially inner discipline help to make leisure what it is supposed to be—a chance for *re-creation*. But on the whole people miss the opportunity to enjoy leisure even more thoroughly than they do with working time. Over sixty years ago, the great American sociologist Robert Park already noted: "It is in the improvident use of our leisure, I suspect, that the greatest wastes of American life occur." ...

Unless a person takes charge of them, both work and free time are likely to be disappointing. Most jobs and many leisure activities—especially those involving the passive consumption of mass media—are not designed to make us happy and strong. Their purpose is to make money for someone else. If we allow them to, they can suck out the marrow of our lives, leaving only feeble husks. But like everything else, work and leisure can be appropriated for our needs. People who learn to enjoy their work, who do not waste their free time, end up feeling that their lives as a whole have become much more worthwhile. "The future," wrote C. K. Brightbill, "will belong not only to the educated man, but to the man who is educated to use his leisure wisely." [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper & Row, 1990, pp. 162-163]

Related:
– Optimizing Your Free Time
– Why is lifelong learning important?

9. What constitutes mental health? How should we be educated to this end?

1 [The goals of therapy] encompass a number of aims. The patient must acquire the capacity to assume *responsibility* for himself, in the sense of feeling himself the active, responsible force in his life, capable of making decisions and of taking the consequences. With this goes an acceptance of responsibility toward others, a readiness to recognize obligations in whose value he believes, whether they relate to his children, parents, friends, employees, colleagues, community, or country.

Closely allied is the aim of achieving an *inner independence* ... This would mean primarily enabling the patient to establish his own hierarchy of values and to apply it to his actual living. In reference to others it would entail respect for their individuality and their rights, and would thus be the basis for a real mutuality. It would coincide with truly democratic ideals.

We could define the goals in terms of *spontaneity of feeling,* an awareness and aliveness of feeling, whether in respect to love or hate, happiness or sadness, fear or desire. This would include a capacity for expression as well as for voluntary control. Because it is so vital, the capacity for love and friendship should be especially mentioned in this context; love that is neither parasitic dependence nor sadistic domination but, to quote Macmurray, "a relationship ... which has no purpose beyond itself; in which we associate because it is natural for human beings to share their experience; to understand one another, to find joy and satisfaction in living together; in expressing and revealing themselves to one another."

The most comprehensive formulation of therapeutic goals is the striving for *wholeheartedness:* to be without pretense, to be emotionally sincere, to be able to put the whole of oneself into one's feelings, one's work, one's beliefs. It can be approximated only to the extent that conflicts are resolved. ...

Neither the analyst nor the patient is likely wholly to attain these goals. They are ideals to strive for; their practical value lies in their giving us direction in our therapy and in our lives. [Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, 1945, W. W. Norton & Co., 1966, pp. 240-243]

2 Here then is my theoretical model of the person who emerges from therapy or from the best of education, the individual who has experienced optimal psychological growth—a person functioning freely in all the fullness of his organismic potentialities; a person who is dependable in being realistic, self-enhancing, socialized, and appropriate in his behavior; a creative person, whose specific formings of behavior are not easily predictable; a person who is ever-changing, ever developing, always discovering himself and the newness in himself in each succeeding moment of time.

Let me stress, however, that what I have described is a person who does not exist. He is the theoretical goal, the end-point of personal growth. We see persons moving *in this direction* from the best of experiences in education, from the best of experiences in therapy, from the best of family and group relationships. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, pp. 295-296]

3 [T]he person's main task is to put his self-esteem as firmly as possible under his own control; he has to try to get individual and durable ways to earn self-esteem. It means, too, that he has to free himself from a slavery to things that are close at hand. ... The person has to learn to derive his self-esteem more from within himself and less from the opinions of others; he has to try to base it on real qualities and capacities, things he can make or do, ... and not on the mere appearances that others like to judge by. He has to try to get as many ways of earning self-esteem as possible, to constantly broaden his skills, the things he genuinely takes pleasure in, in place of what others think he should take pleasure in. [Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*, Free Press, 1971, pp. 191-192]

4 We can think of these ideas as "the philosophy of self-esteem"—a set of interrelated premises that inspire behaviors leading to a strong sense of efficacy and worth. ...

Living Consciously: ... I am better served by holding my values consciously than unconsciously—and by examining them rather than by holding them uncritically as not-to-be-questioned "axioms." I need to be on the lookout for temptations to evade unpleasant facts ... To remain effective, I need to keep expanding my knowledge; learning needs to be a way of life. The better I know and understand myself, the better the life I can create. Self-examination is an imperative of a fulfilled existence.

Self-Acceptance: At the most fundamental level, I am for myself ... I accept myself. I accept the reality of my thoughts, even when I cannot endorse them and would not choose to act on them; I do not deny or disown them. I can accept my feelings and emotions without necessarily liking, approving of, or being controlled by them; I do not deny or disown them. I can accept that I have done what I have done, even when I regret or condemn it. I do not deny or disown my behavior. ...

Self-Responsibility: I am responsible for my choices and actions ... for the level of consciousness I bring to my work and other activities ... for how I prioritize my time ... for the quality of my communications ... for my personal happiness ... for choosing or accepting the values by which I live. I am responsible for raising my self-esteem; no one else can give me self-esteem. ...

Self-Assertiveness: In general, it is appropriate for me to express my thoughts, convictions, and feelings, unless I am in a context where I judge it objectively desirable not to. ...

Living Purposefully: Only I properly can choose the goals and purposes for which I live. No one else can appropriately design my existence. If I am to succeed, I need to learn how to achieve my goals and purposes. I need to develop and then implement a plan of action. ...

Personal Integrity: I should practice what I preach ... keep my promises ... honor my commitments ... deal with other human beings fairly, justly, benevolently, and compassionately ... strive to make my life a reflection of my inner vision of the good. My self-esteem is more valuable than any short-term rewards for its betrayal. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 161-166]

5 The Mental Demands of Modern Life [are such that]: ...

As citizens of a diverse society [we should be able to]: Resist our tendencies to make "right" or "true" that which is merely familiar; and "wrong" and "false" that which is only strange. ... Be able to *look at* and evaluate the values and beliefs of our psychological and cultural inheritance rather than be captive of those values and beliefs. ...

In psychotherapy: ... Learn to stand on our own feet emotionally, intellectually, economically. Learn to stop reindoctrinating ourselves with the unwholesome philosophies of life, or values, we imbibed and taught ourselves in youth. ... Learn the

psychological myths or scripts that govern our behavior *and reauthor them* (rather than just use insight for better understanding of why the script is as it is).

In school: Exercise critical thinking. Examine ourselves, our culture, and our milieu in order to understand how to separate what we feel from what we should feel, what we value from what we should value, and what we want from what we should want. Be a self-directed learner (take initiative; set our own goals and standards; use experts, institutions, and other resources to pursue these goals; take responsibility for our direction and productivity in learning). See ourselves as the co-creators of the culture (rather than only shaped by culture). Read actively (rather than only receptively) with our own purpose in mind. Write to ourselves and bring our teachers into our self-reflection (rather than write mainly to our teachers and for our teachers). [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 302-303]

6 "Our ultimate educational objective is a self-starting, self-criticizing, and self-nourishing mind—a mind that can function powerfully, creatively, and wisely under its own steam" [Theodore M. Greene, *Liberal Education Reconsidered*, 1953]. A man, in other words, who could freely dispose of his own energies, beholden to no one in any uncritical or slavish way—a man who would inject the continually fresh and new into the world. Democratic man, in the original and now-lost meaning of the term. [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 35-36]

7 Based on the data from empirical research on the correlations between personality traits ... and lifelong achievement, five personality facets have emerged as the most relevant to one's success in today's world: grit, self-control, self-confidence, empathy, and a service mindset. ...

Commonly associated personality traits in a gritty person are perseverance, hard work, tenacity, passion, and strong will. ...

[Self-control] is defined as the ability to suppress proponent responses in the service of a higher goal" [Duckworth & Seligman, 2006], or "the ability to control one's behavior and desires and delay gratification for later rewards" [Myers, 2012]. ...

Self-confidence refers to the assuredness in one's own worth, abilities, and power ... This assuredness is linked with possessing certain knowledge, skill sets or abilities, whether it is acquired or innate. ... Even though childhood experiences are important, self-confidence can be learned, built on, and developed. [This process] involves two basic steps: (1) learning and improving skills required for a task, and (2) facing fear of failure. ...

The academic definition of the empathic trait typically includes (1) the affective capacity to share in another's feelings, (2) the cognitive ability to understand another's feelings and perspective ... and sometimes (3) the ability to communicate one's empathetic feelings and understanding to another by verbal or nonverbal means. ...

If developing empathy is an intellectual endeavor, developing a service mindset is putting this intellectual ability into action. ... Serving and being appreciated by others not only fulfills one's fundamental needs, but also improves one's learning ability through improved cognitive engagement. [Daisy Zhang-Negrerie, "Personality Matters: Personality Traits," *Counting What Counts: Reframing Education Outcomes*, edited by Yong Zhao, Solution Tree, 2016, pp. 52-58]

8 Another change which occurs as the result of successful psychotherapy is that the patient comes to feel increasing confidence in his own judgment. Thomas Szasz, the controversial American psychoanalyst, defines the aim of psychoanalytic treatment as being "to increase the patient's knowledge of himself and others and hence his freedom of choice in the conduct of his life". Szasz is particularly insistent that the therapist should not give advice or do anything else which might interfere with the patient's autonomy; indeed, he calls his own brand of psychoanalysis "autonomous psychotherapy". [Carl] Rogers also notes that the client who improves "increasingly trusts and values the process which is himself". It is very characteristic of depressed and dependent people that they attribute more value to the judgment of others than to their own; which is why, during the course of therapy, the therapist must always take the attitude of helping the patient to find his own answers rather than guiding him or giving him direct advice. Part of growing up is to realize that one's own thoughts and feelings may be trustworthy guides for oneself, even if others do not necessarily find them so, for them. [Anthony Storr, *The Art of Psychotherapy*, Methuen, 1980, p. 153]

9 Becoming autonomous involves developing integrated regulatory processes for managing behavior when emotions have been stimulated. By doing that, people will be able to experience true choice with respect to their behavior when they are angry, disgusted, or joyful. ... Behaviors will be chosen based on an awareness of the emotion and on a consideration of the goals they would like to accomplish. When people are autonomous, they will allow a full experience of their emotions, and they will feel free in deciding how to express them. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 191]

10 Suppose you read about a pill that you could take once a day to reduce anxiety and increase your contentment. Would you take it? Suppose further that the pill has a great variety of side effects, all of them good: increased self-esteem, empathy, and trust; it even improves memory. Suppose, finally, that the pill is all natural and costs nothing. Now would you take it?

The pill exists. It is meditation. ...

Mediation done every day for several months can help you reduce substantially the frequency of fearful, negative, and grasping thoughts, thereby improving your affective style. As Buddha said: "When a man knows the solitude of silence, and feels the joy of quietness, he is then free from fear and sin." [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 35-37]

11 One reason that people interpret many events as threats is that they have developed ego-involvements. Being ego involved ... means that people's feelings of self-worth are contingent upon some type of outcome. ...

Ego-involvements make people a pawn to their emotions. If they need to be seen as strong in order to feel worthy, being called a wimp will threaten their self-worth and could send them into a rage. ... [B]y being ego-involved people give others a weapon. And others quickly learn how to use it. ...

Part of how people can rise above the situation is to take interest in their own ego-involvements, to begin to explore what hooks them. Then they can ask themselves whether it is really necessary to pressure and control themselves in that way. By exploring their ego-involvements, people can find ways of becoming less reactive, less controlled, less like a pawn. By exploring their ego-involvements and how ego-involvements affect

the interpretations they give to stimuli, people can gain the capacity to regulate their own emotions without suppressing them—people can become more autonomous. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 189-190]

12 [R]esearchers found that if any of the three extrinsic aspirations—for money, fame, or beauty—was very high for an individual relative to the three intrinsic aspirations, the individual was also more likely to display poorer mental health. For example, having an unusually strong aspiration for material success was associated with narcissism, anxiety, depression, and poorer social functioning as rated by a trained clinical psychologist. ... In contrast, strong aspirations for any of the intrinsic goals—meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions—were positively associated with well-being. People who strongly desired to contribute to their community, for example, had more vitality and higher self-esteem. When people organize their behavior in terms of intrinsic strivings (relative to extrinsic) they seem more content—they feel better about who they are and display more evidence of psychological health. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 128]

13 If you want to predict how happy someone is, or how long she will live (and if you are not allowed to ask about her genes or personality), you should find out about her social relationships. Having strong social relationships strengthens the immune system, extends life (more than does quitting smoking), speeds recovery from surgery, and reduces the risks of depression and anxiety disorders. ... [R]ecent work on *giving* support shows that caring for others is often more beneficial than is receiving help. We need to interact and intertwine with others; we need the give *and* the take; we need to belong. [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 133-134]

14 [I] assess the position of all my new clinical clients along a few dimensions largely dependent on the social world when I first start working with them: Have they been educated to the level of their intellectual ability or ambition? Is their use of free time engaging, meaningful, and productive? Have they formulated solid and well-articulated plans for the future? Are they (and those they are close to) free of any serious physical health or economic problems? Do they have friends and a social life? A stable and

satisfying intimate partnership? Close and functional familial relationships? A career—or, at least, a job—that is financially sufficient, stable and, if possible, a source of satisfaction and opportunity? If the answer to any three or more of these questions is no, I consider that my new client is insufficiently embedded in the interpersonal world and is in danger of spiraling downward psychologically because of that. [Jordan Peterson, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, Penguin / Portfolio, 2021, p. 5]

15 Love and work are, for people, obvious analogues to water and sunshine for plants. When Freud was asked what a normal person should be able to do well, he is reputed to have said, "Love and work." If therapy can help a person do those two things well, it has succeeded. In Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, once people have satisfied their physical needs (such as food and shelter), they move on to needs for love and then esteem, which is earned mostly through one's work. Even before Freud, Leo Tolstoy wrote: "One can live magnificently in this world, if one knows how to work and how to love, to work for the person one loves and to love one's work." [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 219-220]

16 Dr. [Diana] Baumrind [a research psychologist at the University of California] believes that it is the authoritative parent, the parent who is warm but also capable of appropriate discipline, and who is committed to supporting a high degree of autonomy with equally high demands for maturity and achievement, who stands to have the best-adjusted child. ... [T]hese are the children who are most likely to have a healthy sense of self, to have developed the skills that comprise the trinity of healthy child development: the ability to lead independent lives, to maintain loving interpersonal relationships, and to enjoy a sense of competence. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 132]

17 These are the qualities of a model progressive education as we understand it here. To be *aware* means to bring reason continually to bear on problems in real life situations; to be *identified* means to know that one has aegis over his own powers and is someone to reckon with; to be *skeptical* means just that—to be critical of any automatic authority; to be *responsible* means to be able to aim for autonomy—to put forth one's own unique meanings and stand up for the consequences; to be *employed* means simply to be

> engaged in something meaningful rather than trivial; to be *tense* finally, means that one believes there is something serious and dramatic about life, that it is a cause for real concern and for the best efforts that one can produce. ... Tenseness implies that there is something to which the individual should dedicate himself over and beyond his petty and selfish concerns. Tenseness, in a word, is the quality of personal responsibility in the cosmic community of man and nature. [Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man*, Free Press, 1968, pp. 294-295]

18

> [Scientists with the Gallup Organization] concluded that well-being embraces five broad areas of life. ...
>
> *Career Well-being*: how you occupy your time or simply liking what you do every day.
>
> *Social Well-being*: having strong relationships and love in your life.
>
> *Financial Well-being*: effectively managing your economic life.
>
> *Physical Well-being*: having good health and energy to get things done on a daily basis.
>
> *Community Well-being*: your sense of engagement with the area where you live. [Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 124-125]

Related:
– What constitutes a successful adolescence?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?

10. What constitutes a successful adolescence?

1 The aim of education in a democratic society is personal growth; but growth, to be significant, does not mean movement in all directions. The development of a mature human being is marked not by a fitful succession of interests, but by the emergence of an organizing center which gives purpose, direction, or meaning to life. [Sidney Hook, *Education for Modern Man: A New Perspective*, 1963, Wipf and Stock, 2019, p. 33]

2 The task we all face as human beings ... is to find and become who we are. ...

[N]o matter the subject matter ostensibly being taught, the real point is to help the students find themselves, and to find their own passion. Anything else is to lead them astray, to do them actual damage. [Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, p. 144]

3 [T]he central developmental task of adolescence is self-definition. Adolescence is the period during which a young person learns who he is, and what he really feels. It is the time during which he differentiates himself from his culture, though on the culture's terms. It is the age at which, by becoming a person in his own right, he becomes capable of deeply felt relationships to other individuals perceived clearly as such. ... A successful initiation leads to group solidarity and a warm sense of belonging; a successful adolescence adds to these a profound sense of self—of one's own personality. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 28-29]

4 Identity formation is not a by-product of adolescence. It's the main goal. ... the time when we start to really become the person we end up being. Of course we are never done, or fixed in a certain state. The beauty of being human is the ability to evolve, adapt, change, grow, learn. But the experiences and feelings and skills we build in adolescence become foundational. In this stage, teens grapple with questions of who they are, what they want to be, and where they fit into society. Erik Erikson, a seminal figure in the field of child development, called this stage of adolescent development "identity versus role confusion." By testing many identities, teens start finding the one that feels right. ...

If the goal of adolescence is finding meaning and ways to matter, and discovering some of the clues to who you want to be, kids need to look around. Instead, young people who spend most of their time in Achiever mode are so focused on one outcome—achieving—they never look up to consider alternative possibilities. In economic terms, they crowd out the time and space to explore what they actually like or care about because they are playing too much field hockey or studying for too many AP tests. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 97, 78]

5 [I]ndividuation is inseparable from the growth of efficacy—that is, from learning how to think, acquire skills, master challenges, cope with new and unfamiliar situations, and extend the range of competence. What we are able to do is intrinsic to the experience of who we are. Through learning, I continue the process of creating myself—not just in childhood but across a lifetime. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 33]

6 For the school, the first step is to increase greatly the emphasis placed on competence. I mean intellectual competence, particularly, since that has been slighted by the school as well as by the rest of our culture. But the need goes deeper than that.

The significance of competence in developing a stable identity is that it makes the self-concept specific. ...

By helping the adolescent develop good, specific reasons for thinking well of himself, the school can contribute greatly to a stable identity. These reasons *are* competences, and adolescents with the help of good teachers can become very competent in mind, heart, and body. It is essential, however, that the adolescent think of this competence as his own and make it his own. The school must bring itself to recognize and respect a far wider variety of competence than it now does; more particularly, it must learn to accept the student's pride in his own distinction as well as cultivate his participation in the things it thinks are important.

School ought to be a place where you can not only learn to *be* a scholar, a fighter, a lover, a repairman, a writer, or a scientist, but learn that you are good at it, and in which your awareness and pride in being good at it become a part of your sense of being you. More emphasis on the sciences, higher standards, stricter discipline: these, of themselves, will

not help at all. They may hinder. A school that, while raising standards in certain academic areas, treats the student more than ever as an object or an instrument, simply becomes a more potent source of alienation.

What is needed is no program of technical training-cum-indoctrination, but the patient development of the kind of character and mind that conceives itself too clearly to consent to its own betrayal. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 216-218]

7 [I]t is within our power to tell our children ... the absolute truth. *They will have succeeded if they discover something they love doing and learn how to do it well.* To say that this accomplishment is more important than making a lot of money and more important than fame or prestige is not idealism. For those of us who have been lucky enough to be happy in our adult vocations or avocations, it is the reality of our lives.

Educational success needs to be redefined accordingly. The goal of education is to bring children into adulthood having discovered things they enjoy doing and doing them at the outermost limits of their potential. The goal applies equally to every child, across the entire range of every ability. There are no first-class and second-class ways to enjoy the exercise of our realized capacities. It is a quintessentially *human* satisfaction, and its universality can connect us all. Opening the door to that satisfaction is what real education does. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 168]

8 Part of learning who you are, part of being able to hear your inner voices, is discovering what it is that you want to do with your life. Finding one's identity is almost synonymous with finding one's career, revealing the altar on which one will sacrifice oneself. ... In our schools, however, many vocational counselors have no sense of the possible goals of human existence, or even of what is necessary for basic happiness. All this type of counselor considers is the need of the society for aeronautical engineers or dentists. No one ever mentions that if you are unhappy with your work, you have lost one of the most important means of self-fulfillment. ...

[T]he schools should be helping the children to look within themselves, and from this self-knowledge derive a set of values. [Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 1971, Penguin, 1993, pp. 177-178, https://www.slideshare.net/

imbangjtrenggana/abraham-h-maslow-the-farther-reaches-of-human-nature-penguin-nonclassics-1993]

9 Erik Erikson ... identified "purposefulness" as a key criterion of "vital individual strength" during our adult years. He argued that an essential task of our earlier years is to emerge from childhood with "a realistic sense of ambition and purpose." ...

The emerging discipline of positive psychology ... has shown that a sense of purpose is prominent among the list of character traits that lead to happiness. ... One of these findings is the intriguing paradox that the happiest people are rarely those who expend a lot of effort trying to attain pleasure for themselves. ...

What *does* matter for happiness is engaging in something that the person finds absorbing, challenging, compelling, especially when it makes a valued contribution to the world beyond the self. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 27-28]

10 A youngster who has abandoned the task of defining himself in dialectical combat with society and becomes its captive and its emissary may be no rarity; but he is a casualty. ...

Must there be conflict between the adolescent and society? The point is that adolescence *is* conflict—protracted conflict—between the individual and society. There are cultures in which this conflict seems hardly to occur; but where it does not, the characteristic development of personality which we associate with adolescence does not occur either. ...

Adolescent conflict is the instrument by which an individual learns the complex, subtle, and precious difference between himself and his environment. ...

But conflict is not war; it need not even involve hostile action. It must, to be sure, produce some hostile feelings, among others. But there need be no intent to wound, castrate, or destroy on either side. Conflict between the adolescent and his world is dialectical, and leads, as a higher synthesis, to the youth's own adulthood and to a critical participation in society as an adult. ...

Delinquency, apathy, and seductive fawning are not aspects of the essential conflict between youth and society which constitutes adolescence. They are the consequences of

the conflict having gone terribly wrong, and a corresponding wisdom and patience—more than is usually available under actual working conditions—are needed to restore it as a fruitful process. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 32-34, 36]

11 "Increasing differentiation" may indeed be part of the story of everyone's development, but "increasing differentiation" can itself be the story of staying connected in the new way, of continuing to hold onto one's precious connections and loyalties while refashioning one's relationship to them so that one *makes them up* rather than *gets made up* by them. [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 221-222]

12 [W]e see groups of boys and young men disaffected from the dominant society. The young men are Angry and Beat. The boys are Juvenile Delinquents. ... [M]ost of the authorities and all of the public spokesmen explain it by saying there has been a failure of socialization. ... And, not enough effort has been made to guarantee belonging, there must be better bait or punishment.

But perhaps there has *not* been a failure of communication. Perhaps the social message has been communicated clearly to the young men and is unacceptable. ...

"Is the harmonious organization to which the young are inadequately socialized, perhaps against human nature, or not worthy of human nature, and *therefore* there is difficulty growing up?" If this is so, the disaffection of the young is profound and it will not be finally remediable by better techniques of socializing. Instead, there will have to be changes in our society and its culture, so as to meet the appetites and capacities of human nature, in order to grow up. [Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, Vintage, 1960, p. 11]

13 [W]hat is growing within the adolescent demands expression, requires it, and must, in addition, be received by the world and given form—or it will wither or turn to rage. ... It is [in adolescence] that a man desires solitude and at the same time contact with the vivid world; must test within social reality the new power within himself; needs above all to discover himself for the first time as a bridge between inner and outer, a maker of value, a vehicle through which culture perceives and transforms itself. ...

[F]amily, community, and school all combine—especially in the suburbs—to isolate and "protect" him from the adventure, risk, and participation he needs; the same energies that relate him at this crucial point to nature result in a kind of exile from the social environment.

Thus the young, in that vivid confrontation with the thrust of nature unfolding in themselves, are denied adult assistance. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, pp. 808-809]

14 We all get socialized once. We spend the first years of our lives learning the usages of our families, our neighborhoods, our religions, our schools, and our nations. We come to an understanding of what's expected. We come to see what the world takes to be good and bad, right and wrong. ... Socialization isn't a simple process, but when it works well, it can produce individuals who thrive in themselves and either do no harm to others or make a genuine contribution to society at large.

But primary socialization doesn't work for everyone. There are always people—how many it's tough to know, but surely a minority—who don't see their own natures fully reflected in the values that they're supposed to inherit or assume. They feel out of joint with their times. ...

To be young is often to know—or to sense—what others have in mind for you and not to like it. But what is harder for a person who has gone unhappily through the first rites of passage into the tribe is to know how to replace the values she's had imposed on her with something better. She's learned a lot of socially sanctioned languages, and still none of them are hers. But are there any that truly might be? Is there something she might be or do in the world that's truly in keeping with the insistent but often speechless self that presses forward internally?

This, I think, is where literature can come in—as can all of other arts and in some measure the sciences, too. By venturing into what Arnold called "the best that has been known and thought," a young person has the chance to discover new vital possibilities. Such a person sees that there are other ways of looking at the world and other ways of being in the world than the one's that she's inherited from her family and culture. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 159-160]

15 [O]ne may say that in a somewhat negative way, clients define their goal, their purpose, by discovering, in the freedom and safety of an understanding relationship, some of the directions they do *not* wish to move. They prefer not to hide themselves and their feelings from themselves, or even from some significant others. They do not wish to be what they "ought" to be, whether that imperative is set by parents, or by the culture, whether it is defined positively or negatively. They do not wish to mold themselves and their behavior into a form which would be merely pleasing to others. They do not, in other words, choose to be anything which is artificial, anything which is imposed, anything which is defined from without. They realize that they do not value such purposes or goals, even though they may have lived by them all their lives up to this point. ...

[G]radually [the client] chooses the goals toward which *he* wants to move. He becomes responsible for himself. He decides what activities and ways of behaving have meaning for him, and what do not. ...

I would not want to give the impression that my clients move blithely or confidently in this direction. No indeed. Freedom to be oneself is a frighteningly responsible freedom, and an individual moves toward it cautiously, fearfully, and with almost no confidence at first.

Nor would I want to give the impression that he always makes sound choices. To be responsibly self-directing means that one chooses—and then learns from the consequences. So clients find this a sobering but exciting kind of experience. As one client says—"I feel frightened, and vulnerable, and cut loose from support, but I also feel a sort of surging up or force or strength in me." This is a common kind of reaction as the client takes over the self-direction of his own life and behavior. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, pp. 170-171]

16 Our cultural insistence on *generalized* patterns of response that ignore the significance of subtle but vital human differences is one of the things that most seriously impedes adolescence. ...

[T]he school attacks the problems of self-definition in a heterogeneous student group as if they were problems in social integration. Integration is the only attack a school that

works like a blender can take; no matter how hard it tries, the problem of preserving the integrity of individual experience is beyond it. ...

The process of becoming an American, as it goes on in high school, tends to be a process of renunciation of differences. This conflicts directly, of course, with the adolescent need for self-determination; but the conflict is so masked in institutionalized gaiety that the adolescent himself usually does not become aware of it. He must still deal with the alienation it engenders. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 65, 91, 94]

17 When controlled, people act without a sense of personal endorsement. Their behavior is not an expression of the self, for the self has been subjugated to the controls. In this condition, people can reasonably be described as alienated.

The issues of autonomy and authenticity, as opposed to control and alienation, are relevant in all aspects of life. They are sometimes manifest dramatically, with societal implications, and other times, subtly, with only personal ramifications. ...

Authoritarians of our era have relied on control, and they have gotten a healthy dose of rebellion along with the conformity they had hoped for. But what is even worse, and what has gone largely unrecognized, is that the price of compliance is itself very steep. That price—profound alienation with all of its ramifications—is detailed in this book. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 2-4]

18 [I]t is often obvious that balking in doing [school] work ... means exactly what it says: The work does not suit me, not this subject, or not at this time, or not in this school, or not in school altogether. The student might not be bookish; he might be school-tired; perhaps his development ought now to take another direction. Yet unfortunately, if such a student is intelligent and is not sure of himself, he *can* be bullied into passing, and this obscures everything. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 127-130]

19 A youngster in trouble or in deep disturbance or conflict is likely to need help with many practical problems, but most of all he needs help in understanding himself and his relation to other people and institutions; he needs help in learning what his real feelings

are. He faces a crisis in the formulation of his identity; his basic need is to learn enough about what he is really like, and what he really wants and needs, to permit him to make intelligent decisions about how he wants to act with respect to the available alternatives.

Such youngsters need skilled professional services, but the service they need is that of a psychotherapist, not of a petty official. A civil service, in dealing with him, is most likely to constitute itself a Ministry of Adjustment; however sophisticated its staff may be about psychodynamics, its basic interest will be in the kind of problem the student creates for the school and for other people. This will serve as the real basis for classifying him and disposing of his case. It is almost impossible for a school guidance counselor or dean really to believe that his function in dealing with a particular student may *not* be to promote adjustment, but rather to help the youngster to find rational rather than destructive *alternatives* to adjustment, in circumstances where adjustment would cruelly violate his emerging conception of himself and the basis for his self-esteem. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 132-134]

20 [A] major characteristic of genuine love is that the distinction between oneself and the other is always maintained and preserved. The genuine lover always perceives the beloved as someone who has a totally separate identity. Moreover, the genuine lover always respects and even encourages this separateness and the unique individuality of the beloved. Failure to perceive and respect this separateness is extremely common, however, and the cause of much mental illness and unnecessary suffering. ...

Adolescents frequently complain that they are disciplined not out of genuine concern but because of parental fear that they will give the parents a bad image. ... Such adolescent resentment is usually justified. Their parents generally do in fact fail to appreciate the unique individuality of their children, and instead regard their children as extensions of themselves, in much the same way as their fine clothes and their neatly manicured lawns and their polished cars are extensions of themselves which represent their status to the world. [M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology Of Love, Traditional Values And Spiritual Growth*, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1978, pp. 160-165]

21 For many children in this culture, parents' demands for achievement have all but crowded out kids' internal push toward autonomy. It is hard to develop an authentic sense of self when there is constant pressure to adopt a socially facile, highly competitive,

> performance-oriented, unblemished "self" that is promoted by omnipresent adults. This may encourage *some* children to perform at high levels, but, more important, it also encourages dependency, depression, and a truncated sense of self in *most* children.
>
> Parents pressure their children to be outstanding, while neglecting the very process by which outstanding children are formed. ... From a psychologist's point of view, outstanding children are those who have developed a "self" that is authentic, capable, loving, creative, in control of itself, and moral. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 65]

22 > Say to them, O father, O mother, ... O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. ... I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. ... If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965, p. 254]

23 > [I]ndividuality is something developing and to be continuously attained, not something given all at once and ready-made. It is found only in life-history, in its continuing growth; it is, so to say, a career and not just a fact discoverable at a particular cross section of life. [John Dewey, "Progressive Education and the Science of Education," 1928, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, pp. 176-177]

Related:
– Why is cultivating individuality in education important?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?
– What is a "gap year"? How can we incorporate maturing activities into education?
– Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?

11. Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?

1 Why is it so important that our children have real responsibility in their lives? Why do most adults seek it and accumulate so much of it? ...

In a word, it's because responsibility brings out our best. Responsibility is a powerful motivator. It makes us push ourselves harder, perform better and care more. Without responsibility, most people would turn to jelly. ...

For the vast majority of us, taking on responsibility is also the only way we have of improving our lifestyles, supporting our families and acquiring the material goods we want. ...

Studies confirm what you knew all along: young people can be taught to handle responsibility, and young people who have learned to handle responsibility are more effective in their lives. [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, pp. 284-285]

2 [W]e create our selves, shape our identity, through what we are willing to take responsibility for; ... self-responsibility, as well as self-reliance and individualism are essential to the well-being of our society. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 16]

3 [T]here are so many ... reasons why we need a concept of responsibility—and why reviving a rich tradition of talking about responsibility can help to enrich our civic life. Without a positive notion of responsibility, we cannot express why it is so important to people that they should have agency over their own lives, nor that they should be seen as having such agency; we could not capture how big a part of people's identities is constituted by their obligations toward others ...

[M]ost citizens cherish the responsibilities that, they feel, give much of the meaning to their lives. ... they care for elderly parents or sick relatives, they enter into romantic partnerships that entail mutual support, or they decide to have children. In a similar

vein, they devote themselves to causes and projects—political, social, religious, or artistic—because they believe that these hold a significance that extends beyond their own interests. [Yascha Mounk, *The Age of Responsibility: Luck, Choice, and the Welfare State*, Harvard UP, 2017, pp. 169, 188]

4 You positively need to be occupied with something weighty, deep, profound, and difficult. Then, when you wake up in the middle of the night and the doubts crowd in, you have some defense: "For all my flaws, which are manifold, at least I am doing *this*. At least I am taking care of myself. At least I am of use to my family, and to the other people around me. At least I am moving, stumbling upward, under the load I have determined to carry." You can attain some genuine self-respect that way—but it is not a mere shallow psychological construct that has to do with how you are construing yourself in the moment. It is far deeper than that—and it is not only psychological. It is *real*, as well as psychological.

Your life becomes meaningful in precise proportion to the depths of the responsibility you are willing to shoulder. That is because you are now genuinely involved in making things better. You are minimizing the unnecessary suffering. You are encouraging those around you, by example and word. You are constraining the malevolence in your own heart and the hearts of others. [Jordan Peterson, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, Penguin / Portfolio, 2021, p. 134]

5 [There was] a time when the household was practically the center in which were carried on, or about which were clustered, all the typical forms of industrial occupation. ...

We cannot overlook the factors of discipline and of character-building involved in this kind of life: ... in the idea of responsibility, of obligation to do something, to produce something, in the world. There was always something which really needed to be done, and a real necessity that each member of the household should do his own part faithfully and in co-operation with others. ...

At present, concentration of industry and division of labor have practically eliminated household and neighborhood occupations—at least for educational purposes. ... [T]here is a real problem: how shall we retain these advantages, and yet introduce into the school something representing the other side of life—occupations which exact personal responsibilities and which train the child in relation to the physical realities of

life? [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, pp. 6-9, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

6 There is no question that listlessness, ennui, and even violence in school are related to the fact that students have no useful role to play in society. The strict application of nurturing and protective attitudes toward children has created a paradoxical situation in which protection has come to mean excluding the young from meaningful involvement in their own communities. ... [A]s things stand now in many places, the energy of the young works in opposition to learning; that is, it is an *obstacle* that schooling must overcome. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 102]

7 *Growth, like any ongoing function, requires adequate objects in the environment* to meet the needs and capacities of the growing youth ... until he can better choose and make his own environment. It is not a "psychological" question of poor influences and bad attitudes, but an objective question of real opportunities for worthwhile experience. ... [O]ur abundant society is at present simply deficient in many of the most elementary objective opportunities and worthwhile goals that could make growing up possible. ...

It's hard to grow up when there [aren't] enough ... jobs that are necessary or unquestionably useful; that require energy and draw on some of one's best capacities; and that can be done keeping one's honor and dignity. In explaining the widespread troubles of adolescents ... , this simple objective factor is not much mentioned. Let us here insist on it. [Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, Vintage, 1960, pp. 12, 17]

8 The "right settings" are ones that offer young people genuine challenges, that require young people to accept genuine responsibility, and that give young people an opportunity to develop skills that they recognize as useful for their future prospects. In the absence of such, skepticism about the core values of work and responsibility quickly takes root. The problem for too many young people today is that the "right settings" for their healthy growth are becoming increasingly unavailable. This is true all over, and especially so in our more troubled communities. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 54-55]

9 Today's affluent societies will likely never go back to the time when children's efforts were needed to sustain the household economy. But even the wealthiest families can, if they choose, assign their children meaningful obligations, which teach them responsibility and endow them with a sense that what they do matters in the world. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 157-158]

10 *A sense of responsibility is attained by each child through his or her own efforts and experience.* ... Therefore, it is important to give specific responsibilities to children matched to their different levels of maturity.

In most homes children present problems, but parents find the solutions. If children are to mature, they must be given the opportunity to solve their own problems. [Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, 1965, Three Rivers, 2003, p. 88]

11 Responsibility is fostered by allowing children a voice and, wherever indicated, a choice in matters that affect them. *A deliberate distinction is made here between a voice and a choice.* There are matters that fall entirely within the child's realm of responsibility. In such matters the child should have a choice. There are matters affecting the child's welfare that are exclusively within our realm of responsibility. In such matters the child may have a voice, but not a choice. We make the choice, while helping the child accept the inevitable. What is needed is a clear distinction between these two realms of responsibility. ...

Children should be deliberately presented with many situations in which they make choices. The parents select the situations; the children make the choices. [Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, 1965, Three Rivers, 2003, pp. 89-90]

12 [I]f we want children to make good values their own over the long haul—then there is no substitute for giving them the chance to become actively involved in deciding what kind of ... classroom or school they want to have. ...

Anyone who truly values democracy ought to be thinking about preparing students to participate in a democratic culture or to transform a culture into a democracy, as the case may be. The only way this can happen, the only way children can acquire both the skills of decision making and the inclination to use them, is if we maximize their

experiences with choice and negotiation. [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

13 One advantage our boarding-school has over a day school: we can have community self-government where the children make their own laws. In a day school there is nothing to govern about, for the school means lessons. ... To me this community living is infinitely more important in a child's education than all the textbooks in the world.

Democracy should not wait until the age of voting ... [A. S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, 1960, St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 23]

14 [I]f agency and esteem are central to the construction of a concept of Self, then the ordinary practices of school need to be examined with a view to what contribution they make to these two crucial ingredients of personhood. ... [T]he granting of more responsibility in setting and achieving goals in all aspects of a school's activities could contribute—everything from maintenance of the school's physical plant to a share in decisions about academic and extracurricular projects to be undertaken. Such a conception, earlier so dear to the progressive tradition in education, is also in the image of the constitutional principal that (in a democracy) rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. If, as I noted at the outset, school is an entry into the culture and not just a preparation for it, then we must constantly reassess what school does to the young student's conception of his own powers (his sense of agency) and his sensed chance of being able to cope with the world both in school and after (his self-esteem). In many democratic cultures, I think, we have become so preoccupied with the more formal criteria of "performance" and with the bureaucratic demands of education as an institution that we have neglected this personal side of education. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, pp. 38-39]

15 We have known for years that if you treat people, young kids included, as responsible, contributing parties to the group, as having a job to do, they will grow into it—some better than others, obviously, but all benefit. Even old people in nursing homes, if made responsible members of the community with duties to discharge, live longer, get sick less, keep their mental powers longer. ... We need desperately to look more closely at what we mean by an "enabling" culture, particularly that part of the enabling culture

represented by its schools. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, p. 77]

16 [*K*]*ids and teenagers are much more capable than we give them credit for.* If we consider the power of high school student activists, teen artists and musicians, kids with significant work or household responsibilities, and young people with a mission to do good in the world, it's hard to think that all they can be entrusted to do is go to school and play sports. ...

Remember that kids have a brain in their heads and want their lives to work. They almost always step up to the plate when they are respectfully entrusted with responsibility. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 39]

17 [Curtis] Sliwa is best known for founding the Guardian Angels, a group of young people trained in martial arts and sporting red berets who made it their business to protect the innocent on New York subways. ... Sliwa took tough young people and transformed them into productive citizens, mainly by giving them meaningful adult responsibilities and a positive mission. ... Sliwa's philosophy should now be familiar: "Empower people to help themselves, build self-esteem and confidence, arm them with responsibility, and you tap into the greatest source of lasting good possible." [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, p. 99]

18 [T]he idea that we must wait until children are mature enough to handle responsibilities may set up a vicious circle: after all, it is experience with decisions that helps children become capable of handling them. [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

19 The belief that children and even teenagers are incapable of rational decision-making and self-direction is a self-fulfilling prophecy. By confining children to school and other adult-directed school-like settings, and by filling their time with forced busywork, which serves no productive purpose, we deprive them of the time and opportunities they need

to practice self-direction and responsibility. And so, children themselves, as well as their parents and teachers, come to think that children are incompetent. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 70]

20 On your own, you have to face the responsibility for how you spend time. But in school you don't. What they make you do may obviously be a waste but at least the responsibility isn't charged to your account. ... Once you're in [school], you may have all kinds of problems but freedom isn't one of them. [Jerry Farber, quoted by Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, p. 185]

21 For a person to feel responsible for his actions, he must sense that the behavior has flowed from *the self*. [Stanley Milgram, "The Perils of Obedience," *Harper's Magazine*, 1974, https://web.physics.utah.edu/~detar/phys4910/readings/ethics/PerilsofObedience.html]

22 Today too many students graduate or drop out of school without a single achievement for which they can feel uniquely responsible or justly proud. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 4]

23 S-chool people talk all the time about "teaching responsibility." Yet it is absurd to think that an institution that commands and judges every part of a child's life and thought can make him more responsible. It can only make him less so. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 185-186]

24 In our society ... there is a great period of delay between the early childhood training and the assumption of responsible adult action. This means that for years the child and youth is forced to abrogate trial-and-error action, and the assumption of his own responsibility. He is simply not allowed to be an uninhibited agent in many areas of experience. The effect of this abrogation is precisely one that will *reinforce* the limited perceptions of the early learning period. If the youth cannot broaden his awareness by his own responsible coping action, then he must operate completely and unthinkingly under the constrictions of the early parental training, and the continual guidance of the

parents, even up to late adolescence. We can see, then, how the society in which one is immersed actually creates neurosis by ushering the child into a limited world view, and then preventing him from broadening this view by his own self-critical and independent action. This is, in effect, a form of forced alienation, which creates the human unconscious. ... [T]he greater the period of delay between early training and the assumption of responsible adult action, the greater the unconscious which inhibits free and broad-ranging choices. ...

[W]e see the possible effects of long exile from responsible exercise of one's own powers. Passive withdrawal from responsibility and violent aggressiveness are, it seems, two poles of the same kind of learning. One lacks sure behaviors for self-expression when he has not been able to learn the feel of his own responsible powers. Aggression is an inept attempt at self-affirmation by someone who has been prevented from learning to cope with life in responsible ways. [Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man*, Free Press, 1968, pp. 163, 302-303]

25 [The *adolescent predicament*] is simply defined as the mismatch between young people's neurobiological needs for status and respect and the level of status or respect afforded to them by their current circumstances (e.g., relationships, roles, jobs). This predicament is what happens when adults force young people to choose between social survival (and risk to long-term well-being) versus social harm (but better long-term well-being). ...

The adolescent predicament can last well into your twenties, even after puberty is done. The reason why is that our society, with its ever-increasing demands for advanced, technical skills, keeps young people in a holding pattern for so long. Consider that some early-maturing youth might be biologically prepared to reproduce by age thirteen, but they might not get a well-paying, full-time job until they are twenty-six, twice the age of biological maturity. That's a long time to be waiting to be afforded status and respect, and it can raise serious questions in a young person's mind about their social standing. Because of this predicament, it's possible for over-twenty brains to still choose behaviors that seem immature from an older adult's perspective. [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 45-46]

26 To gain the skills to [separate from their caregivers, find a mate, and live independently], [teens] scan the savanna, look for danger—especially as it relates to their status—and

seek ways to contribute. To secure their place in society, they seek meaningful experiences that win them respect. The key is, we cannot give that respect to them; they have to earn it. Cultural anthropologists call the process of gaining that status "earned prestige."

As the *Age of Achievement* increasingly focused on academic proficiency, broader opportunities to earn that prestige were sacrificed. ... Kids want experiences and opportunities to contribute, to be social, and to solve problems. Instead, we ask them to study more so that we can rank and sort them. ...

Eager for real experiences and unable to make them happen, kids shut down. Academics who study boredom ... define it as "the aversive state of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity." The problem is not nothing-to-do; it's feeling helpless to change things. They lack agency to move and explore in directions that make sense to them. The opposite of boredom is not being busy; it's being interested.

The solution to kids' boredom is not to ask kids to work harder or jump higher. It's to give them some choice over how they spend their days—in and out of school. It's building the self-awareness and skills to pick the goals that matter to them. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 21-23]

27 [A]re we altogether comfortable about that artificial prolongation of intellectual childhood and adolescence into the years of physical maturity which is so marked in our own day? To postpone the acceptance of responsibility to a late date brings with it a number of psychological complications which ... are scarcely beneficial either to the individual or to society. [Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," 1948, *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, p. 233]

28 American teens are among the most troubled in the world, and the teen years are the most difficult that we experience in life. Our teens are difficult to raise, often unhappy at home, overly immersed in a vacuous teen world that's largely the creation of large corporations, excessively interested in their appearance, overly dependent on drugs and alcohol, unnecessarily careless about sex and excessively angry, violent, moody and depressed—suffering from a preventable condition we might call Extended Childhood

Disorder (ECD). The principle characteristic of ECD is a feeling that one lacks control over one's life ... [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, p. 142]

29 [Common sense] suggests that the more restrictions you place on people who consider themselves to be autonomous and competent, the angrier and less manageable they become. ...

Teen problems in the United States are caused by two factors related to the artificial extension of childhood: we treat young adults as if they are still children, and we isolate them from adults, trapping them in the media-controlled world of teen culture. [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, p. 144]

30 The schools are the means by which we deprive the young of manhood ... and we must not be surprised when they seek that manhood in ways that must of necessity be childish and violent. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 821]

31 No wonder, then, that some of our troubled children constantly break out of their play into some damaging activity in which they seem to us to "interfere" with our world; while analysis reveals that they only wish to demonstrate their right to find an identity in it. They refuse to become a specialty called "child," who must play at being big because he is not given an opportunity to be a small partner in a big world. [Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 1950, W. W. Norton & Co., 1963, pp. 235-238]

32 Q: *Childhood is a wonderful time of life—a time for fun and exploration, when all of our needs are met and nothing is expected from us in return. Aren't we doing our teens a favor by extending childhood?*

A: Driven by evolutionary imperatives established thousands of years ago, the main need a teenager has is to become productive and independent. After puberty, if we pretend our teens are still children, we will be unable to meet their most fundamental needs, and

we will cause some teens great distress. [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, p. 21]

33 [S]elf-esteem is a meaningless concept without a firm grounding in substantive achievement. ...

One of the special ironies in our misconceptions about children's development is that the myths often contradict one another. At the same time that we place self-esteem on a privileged pedestal, we communicate to children that they are not mature enough to be given real responsibilities; that it is too much trouble to get them to do something useful; and that they need to spend their free time "cooling out" from the rigors of their busy lives. In this and many other ways, we infantilize our children. This is especially destructive, because it robs them of a chance to acquire useful competence, thereby demolishing any valid claim to self-worth that they might acquire. Perhaps most seriously, the fiction of youth incompetence turns children inward, away from an orientation towards serving others. ...

It is a common tendency for parents to want "the best of everything" for their children. Unfortunately, too many parents interpret this to mean relieving their children of duties and indulging them with unwarranted privileges. The cultural *Zeitgeist* does not support the notion that what is really best for a child is the opportunity to develop a strong sense of personal responsibility. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 23-24]

34 The artificial extension of childhood is, after all, a *protective* mechanism. Those who engineered it ... were trying to protect the young from harm; at first it was the harm of the factories, but over the decades, things have gotten out of hand. ...

A century ago, we rescued young people from the factories and streets; now we need to rescue them from the schools. ...

Schools are supposed to propel young people forward, but they actually hold many back, preventing them from moving forward with work or more specialized training. [Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, pp. 249, 319-322]

35 In principle there is no reason why young people should not have the chance to learn directly, hands-on, what it means to be a nuclear engineer, oceanographer, plumber, or physician. But in practice adolescents have become extremely sheltered from adult work. In the nineteenth century children needed to be protected by child labor laws against exploitation by owners of mines, factories, and sweatshops, but it seems that now we have gone too far in separating children from work. We mainly train them to be consumers—of abstract information, entertainment, and mostly useless products—with too little regard for concrete, active engagement with the environment. What is needed is an opportunity for youth to experience the joys and responsibilities of making things happen, without being prematurely drawn into monotonous work. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, pp. 219-220]

36 The young are displaced; there seems no other word for it. They are trapped in a prolonged childhood almost unique.

In few other cultures have persons of fifteen or eighteen been so uselessly isolated from participation in the community, or been deemed so unnecessary (in their elders' eyes), or so limited by law. Our ideas of responsibility, our parental feelings of anxiety, blame, and guilt, all of these follow from our curious vision of the young; in turn, they concretize it, legitimize it so that we are no longer even conscious of the ways we see childhood or the strain that our vision puts upon us. That is what needs changing: the definitions we make socially and legally of the role of the young. They are trapped in the ways we see them, and the school is simply one function, one aspect, of the whole problem. ...

The school is expected to do what the community cannot do and that is impossible. In the end, we will have to change far more than the schools if we expect to create a new coherence between the experiences of the child and the needs of the community. ... [W]e will begin to grant greater freedom *and* responsibility to the young; we will drop the compulsory-schooling age to fourteen, perhaps less; we will take for granted the "independence" of adolescents; ... we will discover jobs they can or want to do in the community ... [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, pp. 811-812]

37 The widespread boredom reported by teens could easily be ameliorated if parents, schools, and communities provided opportunities for meaningful work for teens. Jobs, chores, mentoring, and volunteer work all contribute to teens' sense that they have something unique and important to add to their community. Participation in these kinds of activities helps teens develop competence, independence, connection, and real self-esteem. It gives them a sense of being relevant, and helps them to construct an identity greater and more robust than the sum of their test scores and trophies. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 173-174]

38 The idea that once you hand over responsibility, your child will take it up with aplomb is mistaken. As the dynamic changes, it takes time for him—and you—to adjust and develop the skills needed to do things differently. You need to take a long view. And that long view is that he can't do it perfectly the first time out, or do it as well as you would with decades more experience. Remember that he needs to build competency. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 42]

39 The policy of freedom has certain consequences we had better be prepared for. ... But let [students] be mindful of the fact that they *are*, indeed, doing the choosing. The choices are theirs to be responsible for. When the full impact of their responsibility comes home to them, in that movement the need for tests and grades and report cards will have disappeared. [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, pp. 152-153]

40 In its most general terms, the task of education can be stipulated somewhat as follows: to provide the occasions and circumstances for the awakening and intensification of awareness. To be more specific and concrete, education must become an act of *discovery*. But the question is, discovery of what? ...

Let education be *the discovery of responsibility!* Let learning be the sharp and vivid awakening of the learner to the sense of being personally answerable for his own life. ...

Let education be the process by which we awaken in each learner the truth that *he is responsible for his very desire to flee responsibility* ... [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, p. 117]

41 Every person needs to learn and experience—incorporate, take into the body—both [freedom and responsibility]. And they're inseparable. Either without the other becomes a parody, and leads to inappropriate, destructive, and self-destructive behaviors ... Responsibility without freedom is slavery. ... Freedom without responsibility is immaturity. ... Put them together and you've got an entire culture consisting of immature slaves. ... These parodies may be very good if you're interested in growing the economy, but they're very bad if you're interested in life. [Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, p. 194]

42 Liberty and responsibility are inseparable. ...

It is doubtless because the opportunity to build one's own life also means an unceasing task, a discipline that man must impose upon himself if he is to achieve his aims, that many people are afraid of liberty. [F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 1960, U of Chicago P, 2011, pp. 133-134]

43 [This is] the fate faced by too many young people growing up today. Their powers and potentials have been unrecognized by those in charge of them. Their zest for exploration has been curtailed by a stultifying bubble of overprotectiveness. Their self-centered attitudes and habits have been left uncorrected. Their natural desires to gain strength and competence have been discouraged. Their spontaneous interest in the world has been diminished by too much empty experience and too many fearful warnings. They have grown up in a setting devoid of expectation, standards, or guidance, and they have been deprived of a chance to take on real responsibility and to be of real service to others. In all these ways, many children today see little choice but to turn inwards and shut down. ...

All of our children are growing up in a culture that has lost touch with what children need in order to forge character and competence. ...

It is within our reach to provide [a better] chance for every child in our society. ... It will require us to assume a collective sense of responsibility for all of our children. It will require us to build communities—modern villages—that reflect this collective sense of responsibility by providing all the guidelines and educational opportunities that every child deserves. It will also require us, individually as well as in community, to present children with high standards and expectations that can inspire them throughout their

> lifelong development. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 240-242]

44

> If, as children grow, all choices and decisions are made for them by adults, if no expectations are held up to them and no responsibilities required, the danger is that they will remain dependent, inadequately individuated, underdeveloped in competencies appropriate to their age, and of course not self-responsible. If too much is expected of children too soon, if they are burdened by demands beyond their capacity, the danger is that they will sink into passivity and feelings of defeat and congenital incompetence and, again, will not properly individuate or learn self-responsibility.
>
> If parents understand that by the design of our natures we are intended to evolve toward autonomy, and if they choose to support and align themselves with this process, then they will want to be sensitive to opportunities for nurturing competence and self-responsibility. They will seek to elicit not obedience but cooperation. ... They will create an environment of safety, respect, acceptance, and trust, in which a healthy self can grow. They will look for opportunities to offer their children age-appropriate choices and responsibilities and thus teach accountability. They will assign tasks that allow the child to make some contribution to the running of the household ... so that the child gains experience in feeling effective as a family member. ... They will honor signs of self-responsibility. They will communicate their belief in the child's abilities and worth. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 34-35]

Related:
– What constitutes a successful adolescence?
– What is a "gap year"? How can we incorporate maturing activities into education?
– How are young people prepared for the world of work?
– How can young people be exposed to challenge in ways that foster growth?

12. How can young people be exposed to challenge in ways that foster growth?

1 [M]any parents, ... while pushing their children to excel, inadvertently shield them from exactly the kind of experience that can lead to character growth. As [Karen] Fierst put it, "Our kids don't put up with a lot of suffering. They don't have a threshold for it. They're protected against it quite a bit. And when they do get uncomfortable, we hear from their parents. We try to talk to parents about having to sort of make it okay for there to be challenge, because that's where learning happens." ...

It is a central paradox of contemporary parenting, ... we have an acute, almost biological impulse to provide for our children, to give them everything they want and need, to protect them from dangers and discomforts both large and small. And yet we know—on some level, at least—that what kids need more than anything is a little hardship: some challenge, some deprivation that they can overcome, even if just to prove to themselves that they can. As a parent, you struggle with these thorny questions every day, and if you make the right call even half the time, you're lucky. But it's one thing to acknowledge this dilemma in the privacy of your own home; it's quite another to have it addressed in public, at a school where you send your kids at great expense. [Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, p. 84]

2 Of course we'd all like our children to be happy, but we also know (albeit reluctantly) that ... the growth (emotional, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual) needed to make one's way through life comes out of challenge, and challenge can bring disappointment, anger, and frustration. It would be foolish to want only "happiness" for our children. This would leave them stunted and poorly prepared for life's inevitable difficulties. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, p. xvi]

3 Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom; indeed, they create our courage and our wisdom. It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually. When we desire to encourage the growth of the human spirit, we challenge and encourage the human capacity to solve problems, just as in school we deliberately set problems for our

children to solve. It is through the pain of confronting and resolving problems that we learn. [M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology Of Love, Traditional Values And Spiritual Growth*, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1978, p. 16]

4 In a supportive and respectful family, children go about the business of forging a "sense of self" by being exposed to, and learning to manage, increasingly complex personal and interpersonal challenges. ...

[I]t is critical for the adolescent to fumble with difficult tasks and choices in order to master the art of making independent, healthy, moral decisions that can be called upon in the absence of parents' directives. We all want our children to put their best foot forward. But in childhood and adolescence, sometimes the best foot is the one that is stumbled on, providing an opportunity for the child to learn how to regain balance, and right himself. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 8-9]

5 It is precisely the activities that are difficult but fun that provide the best training for a productive and personally fulfilling career. One implication for educators is that teenagers must be encouraged to see that starting any activity presents difficulties and that overcoming these will yield great dividends in experience and the development of new skills. Parents and teachers must also help ease teenagers' transitions during the discouraging period in which the activity seems too difficult to be worth a try and before intrinsic rewards make the activity self-sustaining. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, pp. 76-77]

6 Experiencing high levels of challenge and skill is part of an important dynamic in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Whenever teenagers report being in high challenge, high skill situations, the quality of their experience is positive. ...

Teenagers, bear in mind, usually say that they don't *like* challenges, that they prefer things to be easy. Given a choice, they would usually prefer to be in the state of relaxation ... Yet ... despite these preferences, it is when adolescents are challenged to get the most from their skills that they truly get the most from their experiences. [Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, pp. 111-112]

7 [I]t is not in children's natures to find challenge stressful, as long as they are given support while facing the challenge. In fact, what children find far more stressful is the expectational vacuum created by a lack of challenge. This is the real risk for today's children—nothing to strive for, ... "nothing to believe in" ... Children are natural stivers, but they need settings where they are both engaged and challenged. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 120]

8 [I]f you want to keep your children as safe as possible, the best thing to do is to give them experience and teach them judgment. Let them climb that tree and fall when they're six—it will teach them important skills about risk and about being in their bodies. ... Your kids need practice managing and taking nonlethal risks. After all, life isn't exactly risk free—we take risks in love, in work, in finance all the time. Learning how to recognize and manage risk is part of growing up. Remind your children that you are not always watching them and that you cannot always keep them safe, so they will take some of that responsibility on themselves. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 100-101]

9 *It is far better to render Beings in your care competent than to protect them.*

And even if it were possible to permanently banish everything threatening—everything dangerous (and, therefore, everything challenging and interesting)—that would mean only that another danger would emerge: that of permanent human infantilism and absolute uselessness. How could the nature of man ever reach its full potential without challenge and danger? [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, p. 47]

10 It is our own sense of superiority over our children that makes us think they are too little to solve problems or to take frustrations in their stride. This false impression must be acknowledged and replaced with trust and confidence in the child's abilities, and with our desire to provide guidance. Certainly we don't abandon a child to his fate, nor do we

let him experience the full impact of life all at once. We use our heads! Instead of being a front behind which the child basks in innocence, we become a sieve, which filters life experience in amounts which the child can meet. We are constantly on the alert for opportunities to step back and allow our child to experience *his* strength. We stand ready to step in at the point at which the problem becomes too much for him. We can start this procedure at the day of his birth. Little by little, with care and guidance, we hand our child life and its problems, challenges, and satisfactions. [Rudolf Dreikurs with Vicki Soltz, *Children: The Challenge*, 1964, Plume / Penguin, 1990, pp. 191-192]

11 Shelter your children when young, but if the sheltering goes on through the child's teens and twenties, it may keep out wisdom and growth as well as pain. ...

For adversity to be maximally beneficial, it should happen at the right time (young adulthood), to the right people (those with the social and psychological resources to rise to challenges and find benefits), and to the right degree (not so severe as to cause PTSD). Each life course is so unpredictable that we can never know whether a particular setback will be beneficial to a particular person in the long run. ... Go ahead and erase some of those early traumas, but think twice, or await further research, before erasing the rest. [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 152-153]

12 We know that people are happiest when they're appropriately challenged—when they're trying to achieve goals that are difficult but not out of reach. Challenge and threat are not the same thing. People blossom when challenged and wither when threatened. [Matthew Killingsworth, *Harvard Business Review*, quoted by Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 1990, Bantam, 2013, p. xxxviii]

13 [W]hen kids seem to be reluctant to try the harder test items because they're afraid of failure ... [Bill] will say, "The items you're working on now are actually for older kids. You've already done the ones for kids your own age. I don't expect you to get these, but you've earned the right to try them, and I'd love to see you give them a shot." After hearing this message, 100 percent of Bill's clients give enormous effort to solve problems they are not expected to solve. ...

On the surface, it seems that statements like these communicate low expectations, right? But actually what they do is lessen the feeling of threat. We've known for over thirty years that the best learning environment for kids is one of high challenge, but low threat. This means that kids learn, and perform, best when they feel challenged (and not bored), and when parents and teachers express confidence in their abilities—but when it's safe to make mistakes, to not understand at first, or to struggle a bit. When kids are fearful, the main task is to take that threat away. Communicate confidence, but not rigid requirements for performance or achievement. Emphasize both "I believe in you" and "you're safe—you'll be okay no matter how you do." [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 159]

14 Students learn and perform best in an environment that offers high challenge and low threat—when they're given difficult material in a learning environment in which it is safe to explore, make mistakes, and take the time they need to learn and produce good work. When students know it's all right to fail, they can take the kinds of risks that lead to real growth. ...

Many of the kids we see aren't learning in this environment. They're learning in a brain-toxic environment, where their days consist of stress and fatigue, often accompanied by high levels of boredom. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 178]

15 What all too often happens [in school] is that [children] learn to see school challenges as threats, which they usually are, not just because you have a good chance of failing to accomplish them, but because if you do fail you are almost certain to be criticized, shamed, or even punished. They become so used to dodging and escaping these daily threats that they fall more and more out of the habit of challenging themselves, even outside of school. Their school-learned fears infect the whole of their life. The world, which had once seemed at least neutral if not actually friendly and tempting, begins to look more and more like an unpredictable and dangerous enemy. [John Holt, *How Children Learn*, 1964, Da Capo Press, 1982, p. 164]

16 [A] teacher, asking a student to do an easy task so that he may later do a harder one, must be careful not to be too rigid about this. If the student can't hurt himself doing the harder task, let him try it if he wants. The most valuable and indeed essential asset the student brings to any learning task is a willingness to adventure, to take risks. Without that, he can't learn anything. The teacher must not kill this spirit, but honor and strengthen it. Thus, one of the stupidest things the S-chools do is insist that children "comprehend" everything they read, and read only what they comprehend. People who read well do not learn to read this way. They learn by plunging into books that are "too hard" for them, enjoying what they can understand, wondering and guessing about what they do not, and not worrying when they cannot find an answer. Few children in S-chool are allowed to act or feel that way. They are made to feel that not to "comprehend" is a kind of crime. They stop thinking of themselves as adventurers and explorers, and books as exciting territory to explore. They read only what they can be sure of, which means that it is dull, which means they will stop reading as soon as they can. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 71-72]

17 In order to learn something, we have to shift our nervous system into states that are somewhat uncomfortable. These should be *safely* uncomfortable states, but they should be uncomfortable states. … Any kind of successful learning or goal pursuit is going to involve errors, failures, frustration, anxiety. All of those states of mind and body, in fact, shift the brain into modes of so-called neuroplasticity—they give it the ability to change. And that should make perfect sense, because if you can complete what you need to do easily, there is absolutely no reason for the neural circuitry in your brain or body to shift in any way. Why would it? [Andrew Huberman, "Goals Toolkit: How to Set and Achieve Your Goals," *Spotify*, uploaded by Huberman Lab, 23 Aug. 2023, 10:20, https://open.spotify.com/episode/0sFYKmVjh2gEfBWfj25DNk]

18 Anyone who has done any thinking, even a little bit, knows that it is painful. It is hard work—in fact the very hardest that human beings are ever called upon to do. …

Not only must we honestly announce that pain and work are the irremovable and irreducible accompaniments of genuine learning, not only must we leave entertainment to the entertainers and make education a task and not a game, but we must have no fears about what is "over the public's head." Whoever passes by what is over his head condemns his head to its present low altitude; for nothing can elevate a mind except

> what is over its head; and that elevation is not accomplished by capillary attraction, but only by the hard work of climbing up the ropes, with sore hands and aching muscles. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 234-235]

19

> If life is to continue, one cannot linger for ever in a state of oceanic tranquility. ... Boeotian bliss is not conductive to invention: the hunger of imagination, the desire and pursuit of the whole, take origin from the realization that something is missing, from awareness of incompleteness. ...
>
> Jung thought that the achievement of optimum development of the personality was a lifetime's task which was never completed; a journey upon which one sets out hopefully toward a destination at which one never arrives. ...
>
> "[T]he flow of life again and again demands fresh adaptation. Adaptation is never achieved once and for all ... In the last resort it is highly improbable that there could ever be a therapy which got rid of all difficulties. Man needs difficulties; they are necessary for health. What concerns us here is only an excessive amount of them." [*The Transcendent Function: Collected Works*, VIII, 1969] [Anthony Storr, *Solitude*, Free Press / Macmillan, 1988, pp. 197-198]

Related:
– How do adult expectations influence young people?
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?

13. What is a "gap year"? How can we incorporate maturing activities into education?

1 A gap year is a widely accepted post-high-school option, more common in Europe than in North America but gaining traction here as well: students take a year to work, travel, pursue interests, and generally get a better sense of who they are before beginning college.

As a university instructor, I've found freshmen who took gap years to be light-years ahead of their classmates in their ability to profit from their classes. [Susan Wise Bauer, *Rethinking School: How to Take Charge of Your Child's Education*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2018, p. 31]

2 [My] proposed reorganization of the educational system involves one further innovation which, in my judgment, is an essential ingredient of the plan. It consists in the introduction of a scholastic hiatus, either for two years or four, between the completion of basic schooling and the beginning of advanced schooling in institutions of higher learning. ...

The hiatus is designed to serve a threefold purpose: (1) to interrupt the continuity of schooling and save the young from the scholastic ennui that results from too many successive years of sitting in classrooms and doing their lessons; (2) to counteract the delayed maturity induced by too many years of continuous schooling and thus to remedy some of the disorders of adolescence; and (3) to populate our institutions of higher learning with students who have gained a certain degree of maturity through the experiences afforded them by nonscholastic employments, as well as with students who return to educational institutions for further schooling because they have a genuine desire for further formal study and an aptitude for it, instead of students who occupy space in our higher institutions as the result of social pressures or because to continue on with more schooling is following the path of least resistance. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 136-137]

3 [M]any people get much more from college if they do something else before they go. I used to teach in a university in England, and I often found that the so-called mature

students—those who were taking programs after other work experience—applied themselves with more energy to their studies than younger students who'd gone straight from school. This was because they knew why they were taking the program and were determined to get as much as possible from it. [Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 183-185]

4 Five years of research have proven ... that people who take a gap year get in less trouble, are more likely to graduate on time, do little if any binge drinking, and have higher GPAs. Young men in particular, seem to benefit from the extra year. ... Students who don't have enough money for college or want to avoid debt can work for a year or two first. ...

Aside from better grades, taking a gap year sets college seniors up to tell a great story about themselves when it comes time for the job hunt ... [about how they] made a deliberate choice to go out into the world and do something entirely different for a year. ...

[A]s Abby Falik, the founder of Global Citizen Year, puts it: Gap years are bridge years; a well-engineered connection between one life stage and another; a deliberate pause that is nevertheless not silent or still but filled with something other than what would happen inside a classroom. Students may well find that a gap year will be a bridge to getting so much more per hour, per dollar, out of college than they ever thought possible. [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, Harper Collins, 2021, pp. 226-229]

5 "So what should I do?": where should I go to school? what should I study? ... Of course, these aren't the kinds of questions I or anybody else can answer ... The only concrete suggestion I can offer is one that you've already heard: Take time off. Take time off to slow down, to give yourself perspective, to break the cycle of incessant achievement, to get away from constant supervision, to see that there's a world outside of school, to develop skills and explore capacities you haven't had a chance to cultivate. ...

So-called gap year or bridge year programs are increasingly popular and increasingly encouraged. ... [S]chools want kids who've had a chance to do some maturation. ...

[P]arents should consider that money spent preparing their kids to get the most *out* of college will help them to avoid wasting the money they're already planning to spend *on* college. I was prevented from doing the gap year program that all my closest friends were going on because my father was worried that it would "knock me off my path." The result was a failed college experience and a much longer detour later.

But you should also consider taking a gap year, without the "program" part. Too much structure is among the things you need to get away from ... [A] lot of these programs say: ... keep enriching yourself in approved ways ... that ultimately feed back into the achievement game. ... How about doing something that you can't put on your resume (or brag about on [social media])? [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 123-125]

6 [I]n Europe many young people travel, are involved in political activity, move in and out of the universities, and do many different kinds of work. When it comes to young people between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four, we are much more anxious to push them into the job market than people are in the Western Europe ...

I think it would be greatly to the benefit of our culture and the quality of our lives to let up a bit, slow down, learn more, and acquire less. There's nothing wrong, for example, in taking a year off from college to travel or do community or environmental work or manual labor. The more experience young people have, the more sensibly they can use educational opportunities and integrate what they learn with what they do. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times Books / Random House, 1989, p. 81]

7 [T]he school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, ... [it is] the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience ... [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, pp. 14-15, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

8 Only through the trials of adult life, only with the range and depth of experience that makes for maturity, can human beings become educated persons. The mature may not be as trainable as the immature, but they are more educable by virtue of their maturity.

Education is a lifelong process of which schooling is only a small but necessary part. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 9-10]

9 Taking the time to get off autopilot and to be intentional about decisions is a great growth opportunity. Many students who take gap years spend the time focusing on their interest—be it through a wildlife research study or language immersion school or community service of some kind—and are better suited to study that interest and turn it into a career. Others gain practical, real-world experience or military experience that better prepares them to be adults they in fact are. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 300]

10 [S]uppose half a dozen of the most prestigious liberal arts colleges ... would announce that ... they required for admission a two-year period, after high school, spent in some maturing activity. ...

By "maturing activity" could be meant: working for a living, ... community service, ... Peace Corps, ... a course of purposeful travel, ... independent enterprise in art, business, or science, away from home, with something to show for the time spent.

The purpose of this proposal is twofold: to get students with enough life-experience to be educable on the college level, especially in the social sciences and humanities; and to break the lockstep of twelve years of doing assigned lessons for grades, so that the student may approach his college studies with some intrinsic motivation, and therefore perhaps assimilate something that might change him. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 124-125]

11 There is no comprehension apart from romance. It is my strong belief that the cause of so much failure in the past has been due to the lack of careful study of the due place of romance. Without the adventure of romance, at the best you get inert knowledge without initiative, and at the worst you get contempt of ideas—without knowledge.

But when this stage of romance has been properly guided another craving grows. The freshness of inexperience has worn off; there is general knowledge of the groundwork of

fact and theory: and, above all, there has been plenty of independent browsing amid firsthand experiences, involving adventures of thought and of action. The enlightenment which comes from precise knowledge can now be understood. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays,* 1929, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 52-53]

12 We commonly see adolescents and young adults go off to college without having had much of an opportunity to make decisions about the things that matter, including how they want to structure their time, what they want to commit their energy to, or whether they want to be in school at all. Not surprisingly, they have difficulty setting and meeting goals and making good decisions when it comes time to pick classes or a major or more generally to manage their day. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 61-62]

13 Colleges do not provide the experience or the breadth of vision that allow young people to get a feel for what they might love to do with their lives. In fact, for many youngsters college is a distraction, a delaying tactic, a way of putting off deciding upon a life's work for another four years after high school. Unfortunately, that delay can become extended throughout life, and many people live either without having discovered what they would like to make their life's work or discover it too late to do it. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times Books / Random House, 1989, p. 9]

14 The ideal college would be a kind of educational retreat in which you could try to find yourself; find out what you like and want; what you are and are not good at. People would take various subjects, attend various seminars, not quite sure of where they were going, but moving toward the discovery of vocation, and *once they found it*, they could then make good use of technological education. The chief goals of the ideal college, in other words, would be the *discovery of identity*, and with it, the *discovery of vocation*.

What do we mean by the discovery of identity? We mean finding out what your real desires and characteristics are, and being able to live in a way that expresses them. You learn to be authentic, to be honest in the sense of allowing your behavior and your speech to be the true and spontaneous expression of your inner feelings. [Abraham

Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 1971, Penguin, 1993, p. 176, https://www.slideshare.net/imbangjtrenggana/abraham-h-maslow-the-farther-reaches-of-human-nature-penguin-nonclassics-1993]

15 If parents understand that by the design of our natures we are intended to evolve toward autonomy, and if they choose to support and align themselves with this process, then they will want to be sensitive to opportunities for nurturing competence and self-responsibility. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 34-35]

16 Parents: ... [C]onsider the opportunity of a change in the schedule, or any change in [your children's] status or roles—for example, the start of summer, the start of the school year, the transition from elementary to secondary school, or from secondary school to college, and so on. In those moments, we can mark the transition across the threshold by resetting expectations. We can say, *Now that you are [...] you're a different, more mature person, and that means that our relationship has to evolve. Now is a good time to talk about what will be new, what you can expect from me, and what I expect from you*. ... [Y]ou can mark this by doing something special ... You can take them to a new restaurant, or on a trip ... You may be surprised how much significance you can convey with a small gesture that makes the entrance to a new era feel different. ...

We need to signal clearly that something new and different is possible. ... Cultural rituals ... can send the message that *This is different, you can be a new and different student from this moment, you can accomplish more than you thought possible.* [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 365-368]

17 [T]here is a vast difference between schooling intermitted in life on a farm or in a city with plenty of small jobs, and schooling that is a child's only "serious" occupation and often his only adult contact. Thus, a perhaps outmoded institution has become almost the only allowable way of growing up. And with this pre-emping, there is an increasing intensification of the one narrow experience, e.g. in the shaping of the curriculum and testing according to the increasing requirements of graduate schools far off in time and place. Just as our American society as a whole is more and more tightly organized, so its school system is more and more regimented as part of that organization. [Paul

Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 17-18]

18 To ... make active, competent, and initiating citizens who can produce a community culture and a noble recreation, we need a very different education than the schooling that we have been getting.

Large parts of it must be directly useful, rather than useless and merely aiming at status. ...

On the whole, the education must be voluntary rather than compulsory, for no growth to freedom occurs except by intrinsic motivation. Therefore the educational opportunities must be various and variously administered. We must diminish rather than expand the present monolithic school system. ...

Unlike the present inflexible lockstep, our educational policy must allow for periodic quitting and easy return to the scholastic ladder, so that the young have time to find themselves and to study when they are themselves ready. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 61-62]

19 In centuries past, the time of childhood and adolescence would have been occupied in real work, real charity, real adventures, and the realistic search for mentors who might teach what you really wanted to learn. A great deal of time was spent in community pursuits, practicing affection, meeting and studying every level of the community, learning how to make a home, and dozens of other tasks necessary to becoming a whole man or woman. ...

Independent study, community service, adventures and experience, large doses of privacy and solitude, a thousand different apprenticeships—the one-day variety or longer—these are all powerful, cheap, and effective ways to start a real reform of schooling. [John Gatto, "The Psychopathic School," 1990, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, pp. 25-26, 33]

20 At no other time or place in history have people believed that continuous schooling was the obvious means to prepare most youth for most careers... Many of these careers

require a lot of study. Some of them need academic teaching. But it was never thought useful to give academic teaching in such massive and continuous doses as the only regimen. ...

[A]t present, facing a confusing future of automated technology, excessive urbanization, and entirely new patterns of work and leisure, the best educational brains ought to be devoting themselves to devising *various* means of educating and paths of growing up, appropriate to various talents, conditions, and careers. We should be experimenting with different kinds of school, no school at all, the real city as school, farm schools, practical apprenticeships, guided travel, work camps, little theaters and local newspapers, community service. Many others, that other people can think of. Probably more than anything, we need a community, and community spirit, in which many adults who know something, and not only professional teachers, will pay attention to the young. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 139-141]

21 [Students] respond more fully and more intelligently when they make direct contact with the community and are allowed to choose roles that have some utility for the community and themselves. What is at stake here, I suppose, is the freedom of volition, for this is the basic condition with which people must learn to deal, and the sooner they achieve within that condition wit, daring, and responsibility the stronger they will be. It seems absurd to postpone the assumption of that condition as long as we do. In most other cultures, and even in our own past, young people have taken upon themselves the responsibility of adults and have dealt with it as successfully as most adults do now. The students I have seen can do that, too, when given the chance. What a strain it must be to have that capacity, to sense in one's self a talent for adventure or growth or meaning, and have that sense continually stifled or undercut by the role one us supposed to play.

Thus, it seems inescapably clear that our first obligation to the young is to create a place in the community for them to act with volition and freedom. They are ready for it, certainly, even if we aren't. Adolescents seem to need at least some sense of risk and gain "out there" in the world: an existential sense of themselves that is vivid to the extent that the dangers faced are "real." ... Many wanted to work or travel and others did not; they wanted to sit and think or read or live alone or swim ... They returned from these experiences immeasurably brightened and more sure of themselves, more willing, in that new assurance, to learn many of the abstract ideas we had been straining to teach them.

> It was not simply the experience in itself that brought this about. It was also the feeling of freedom they had, the sense that they could come and go at will and make any choice they wanted—no matter how absurd—if they were willing to suffer what real consequences followed. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, pp. 815-816]

22 > [M]uch of the energy that sometimes goes to thinking about individual children might better be devoted to discovering some worthwhile activity and to arrange the conditions under which it can be carried forward. [John Dewey, "Progressive Education and the Science of Education," 1928, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 176-177]

Related:
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?

14. How can parents improve their influence on their children?

1 To begin with, we must embrace a healthier and radically different way of thinking about success. We need to harness our fears about our children's futures and understand that the extraordinary focus on metrics that has come to define success today—high grades, trophies, and selective school acceptances from preschools to graduate schools—is a partial and frequently deceptive definition. At its best, it encourages academic success for a small group of students but gives short shrift to the known factors that are necessary for success later in life. ... [It] fails to acknowledge those students whose potential contributions are not easily measurable. If we insist on a narrow and metric-based definition of success then we maddeningly consign potentially valuable contributions to our society to an undervalued and even bleak future. ...

While we all hope our children will do well in school, we hope with even greater fervor that they will do well in life. Our job is to help them to know and appreciate themselves deeply; to approach the world with zest; to find work that is exciting and satisfying, friends and spouses who are loving and loyal; and to hold a deep belief that they have something meaningful to contribute to society. This is what it means to teach our children well. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. xv-xvi]

2 In order to strengthen our messages to our children about our core values, we need to make sure that our core values are aligned with our parenting practices. For example, if you say you value physical and emotional well-being and your middle school child isn't getting at least nine hours of sleep a night, then you have to either rethink how much you really do value well-being *or* consider rectifying some of your parenting lapses on this issue. Talking about values can become an almost endless diversion from actually living them. The point here is to get clear on what we value so that we can translate values into actions. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 250]

3 Parents tend to think there are two ways to be: autocratic or permissive. ...

But virtually all child development experts ... have advocated a third option: authoritative parenting. This entails being supportive, but not controlling. ... It emphasizes self-direction and values maturity over obedience. It's a style that sends the message, "I am going to do everything I can to help you be successful, but I'm not going to try to force you to do things because I say so." Authoritative parents don't give their children free rein. They enforce limits, and say when they don't feel right about something, but they are not controlling. With authoritative parenting, the child's developing brain doesn't spend enormous amounts of energy resisting what's often in their own best interest. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 35-36]

4 [C]hild psychologists have learned to distinguish between *authoritative* and *authoritarian* parent/child relationships. In an authoritative relationship, the parent communicates firm, consistent, and clear expectations to the child in the context of open, two-way dialogues. In an authoritarian relationship, the adult communicates little more to the child than arbitrary power, expecting the child to listen and behave without any input on the child's own. Research has demonstrated that *authoritative* relationships lead the child towards genuine competence and responsibility, whereas *authoritarian* ones cause the child to behave well only as long as the adult is looking. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 150]

5 We certainly have times when expressing our disappointment is a necessary part of teaching good values. (For example, "I'm really disappointed in the way you treated your friend.") But our disappointment should be directed at our child's behavior or choices, not at their existence. "You're such a disappointment to me" is the type of sentiment that catapults children into a tailspin of depression or acting out. ...

Whenever we attack our child's developing self we feed feelings of self-hatred, perhaps the most dangerous feelings kids can have. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 147-148]

6 *Every* psychiatrist and psychologist I spoke with over the course of writing this book mentioned a lack of firm limit-setting as one of the major contributors to adolescent dysfunction. "Kids want and need limits" is a common refrain among professionals who deal with troubled and not-so-troubled kids. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 155-156]

7 When limits are necessary, there are several important considerations that will help ensure that the limit setting does not undermine autonomy. First, it is possible to have people set their own limits. ...

In many cases, of course, the teachers, managers, or parents need to set the limits. And as the research has shown, the style they use in presenting the limits is important. For example, avoiding controlling language and acknowledging the resistance people may feel facilitates their willingness to accept the limits. ...

When people who are being limited understand the reason for limits, they are also more likely to accept them without feeling undermined. ...

In some cases, particularly in education, it may be useful to go beyond just providing a rationale to encourage people to think for themselves about why a task might be useful for them. ...

Making the limits as wide as possible and allowing choice within them will help keep people from feeling so restricted. ... [O]nce limits are set and the consequences communicated, it is important to follow through; otherwise, one is undermining one's own credibility. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 149-151]

8 For children who are stressed at school or in other parts of their lives, home should be a safe haven, a place to rest and recover. When kids feel that they are deeply loved even when they're struggling, it builds resilience. Battling your child about due dates and lost work sheets invites school stress to take root at home. So instead of nagging, arguing, and constant reminding, we recommend repeating the mantra, "I love you too much to fight with you about your homework." [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 39]

9 When it comes to making decisions about your kids' lives, you should not be deciding things that they are capable of deciding for themselves. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 57]

10 [P]erhaps the most effective thing you can do is to emphasize to your child that *he* is responsible for his own education. It's not his teacher's job, it's not his principal's job, and it's not your job. If he doesn't have a handle on sixth grade math but needs to know certain things to be able to do prealgebra in seventh, the fact that he had a crummy sixth grade math teacher will be of little consolation. We're not suggesting that you tell your struggling son that it's his fault. ... Rather ... [h]elp your child strategize as to how he can take control of his own learning, with or without the teacher's help. Otherwise he's in a frustrating situation, knowing he isn't learning and feeling helpless to change it. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 175-176]

11 A close attachment requires the development of a one-on-one bond with a parent, and the power of "private" time never diminishes. The way we get to really know someone is to *spend time alone with them*. ... This is true for parent-child relationships as it is for any relationship, and we've seen dramatic turnarounds in discouraged kids when parents started to spend one-on-one time with them—instead of just family time. ...

Bill [William Stixrud] feels lucky he learned about the power of one-on-one time when his kids were very young. He had weekly dates with each of his two kids from when they were three until they left for college. *There are 168 hours in a week*, he always thought to himself, *so surely I can devote two of them to one-on-one time with the most precious things in my life*. ... Bill would usually ask the kids what they wanted to do for private time, and if they weren't sure, he'd offer choices. He promised not to take any phone calls, and every week he'd write the time for the next week's private time in the family calendar. He also consciously made eye contact with his kids during private time (and throughout the week as well.) ...

Your full attention shows them they are worth your time. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 10-11]

12 Individual time matters, and *proximity matters*. Show your kids you care by sitting alongside them—even when they're playing dress-up ... or, more likely, video games. Several experts have suggested that one of the best ways parents can help regulate their children's use of video games, in fact, is to understand the games and even play with them. ...

Proximity also means showing up and being present at events that are meaningful to our kids—like their games, performances, birthdays, and parent-teacher meetings. ... There are few more powerful ways to show kids that they are loved and important to us than to take time out of our day to share something that's important to them. ...

Look, we get it—you're not going to love everything your kid does. But *finding an area of shared interest* is incredibly helpful for connection. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 12]

13 Family rituals also offer a way to connect with our kids and let them know that they are important members of our family. Rituals don't have to be elaborate. ... [They] can involve religious practices, making pizza every Sunday, or something like going to the library together once a week. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 13]

14 [P]arents need to remember that kids love rituals and depend on them for a sense of continuity and connection. Perhaps the single most important ritual a family can observe is having dinner together. ... Eating together reinforces the idea that family members are interested, available, and concerned about each other. It provides a reliable time and place for kids to share accomplishments, challenges, and worries, to check in with parents and siblings, or simply to feel part of the family. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 33]

15 We all have to do the slow, intentional, and transformative work required for connection if we want our time as parents to yield bonded, healthy relationships with our adult children. While parents with lots of resources—financial reserves and privileged contacts—may feel that those opportunities and networks give them a leg up or give them a way

to outsource this work, that's not the case. Resources can create a false sense of security for parents ("we've got everything they need!") and unintentionally foster competitiveness, daunting standards, and kids feeling overwhelmed, while lowering the sense of connection. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 13-14]

16 Children are naturally self-centered ... [they] have difficulty standing in the shoes of other kids. ... Kids learn how to be empathetic because we *teach* them how to be empathetic. We can't ask enough "How would you feel if ... ?" [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, p. 77]

17 *Demonstrating empathy is one of the most important things you can do to be close to your child.* One of our children's deepest needs is to feel heard, and by listening carefully and expressing empathy for their feelings, we help to fill this need. We also strengthen our bond with our child every time we indicate that we understand their experiences. ...

Dealing with kids' emotions in a productive way involves a four-step process, and the first two steps happen before you say a single word.

1. Stay calm and think of your kids' strong emotions as a great opportunity to connect. ... [I]f we can stay calm as they vent or cry or yell, we can lower their emotional charge, which will enable us to communicate [to the part of the brain that can think logically and clearly]. ...

2. Understand and accept rather than judge; be curious rather than accusatory. ... When your kid's upset, you inevitably have subtitles running through your head telling you to use the opportunity as a teaching moment. It's hard, but turn these subtitles off. ...

3. Reflect and validate their feelings. ... Language that communicates careful listening when kids have strong emotions is similar to paraphrasing—but in a way that signals we are trying to understand their feelings. ... "It sounds like ...", "I think you're saying that ...", "Let me see if I understand. ..." Language that expresses validation is similar—but adds the message that *I can see why you feel like that—your feeling is normal*. ...

4. Explore—ask follow-up questions. ... Since [your kids] no longer need to defend or justify themselves, they are more likely to admit their own role in a problem and can

walk alongside you instead of fighting you. ... You can ask questions to better understand the child's experience and explore their openness to hearing advice, or considering ways to solve problems. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 15-22]

18 [T]he meaning teens make about something, rational or not, matters a lot. Dismissing children's emotions is, in essence, dismissing their experience.

This is important for avoiding what [Christina] Bethel calls the *positivity paradox*. By refusing to acknowledge your teen's negative feelings in an attempt to make them feel better, you actually make them feel worse. Recognition and acceptance are important first steps in helping kids in Resister mode. "When pain is acknowledged, it lowers negative emotions and stress," explains Bethell. ...

[Lynn Fainsilber Katz, a psychology professor at the University of Washington,] classified parents' approach to emotions with two categories: those who believe emotions are useful and instructive and worth exploring, and those who think emotions should be dismissed because they are dangerous, annoying, or inappropriate. She found that parents' own feelings about feelings predicted not just children's grades but also their behavior with others. ...

[Some parents] dismiss negative feelings because they think those emotions are painful for their children and their role is to protect them to help them feel better. But doing so can lead children to believe that their emotions are not important or valid, sowing self-doubt and insecurity. Further, these kids do not learn to recognize or manage their emotions because they have internalized the idea that when they feel strong negative emotions, they should avoid them or distract themselves. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 221-222]

19 If I had to summarize in one word all of the research on what kind of parenting helps create the best conditions for a child's and adolescent's growth and development, it would be the term "presence." ... Presence involves being aware of what is happening as it is happening, being receptive to our own inner mental sea, and attuning to the inner life of another person. Being present for others means we resonate with what is going on

in their inner words, creating the essential way we feel their feelings. This feeling felt sensation is at the heart of how we can help one another feel seen, safe, soothed, and secure. Feeling felt is the basis for secure attachment. It is also the essence of healthy relationships in all domains of life.

So often we want to help the people we love fix their problems. We want to show them how to solve a dilemma, resolve a conflict, or get rid of painful emotions. But in order to give them what they need most of all, which is to make them feel felt and connected with us, we need to *not* do these well-intentioned things first and instead simply be present for our loved one. ... This is the part that may be the most challenging, especially for adolescents and parents who are experiencing different feelings about all the changes that are occurring in the adolescent's life and perhaps not seeing eye to eye. [Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, Penguin, 2013, pp. 217-219]

20 [Johnmarshall] Reeve's first tip [for autonomy-supportive teaching] is to listen without intent to fix. ... [I]nstead of giving advice and wondering why your kids don't take it, you take their perspective first. Connect *before* you correct. ... When [adolescents] see an army or parental advice marching toward them, their natural instinct is to protect themselves from the onslaught. ... Perspective taking lowers their force field. You are no longer an intruder. You are an ally asking about what is going on. You become a source of support. ...

Next, really listen to your kids' answers. ... Kids have epic bullshit detectors, so do what you need to do to get in the place that you are actually asking and not accusing. Whatever the answer is, validate it. ... explain that you get it. This is not just getting them to lower their force field but disarm it altogether.

Next, offer ... an explanatory rationale ... [K]ids will be more motivated when they are given a specific reason for something. ... Taking the time to explain the reasoning behind things (before, crucially, jumping in with any advice on the approach) helps students put things in context for themselves.

[Next, when] you share some strategies your kids could use to tackle their [problems] ... use what Reeve calls invitational instead of instructional language. ... "You might try ...", "Have you thought about ...?", "Would you consider ...?" ...

Reeve's final bit of advice is golden: Once you have done all that, and it doesn't do jack baloney, let it go. ... "What I really want the child to do is not to do their homework today," Reeve told us, "What I really want them to do is build a value, a sense of importance in the activity of doing homework, or a work ethic. So I'm not going to blame or give up on you or be disappointed if you don't do your homework tonight. I'll try again tomorrow." ... In the end, we cannot force our children to learn. If they are uninterested and dragging their feet, it may be worth some short-term pain—a couple of missing assignments or bombing a test—to help them develop a sense of ownership. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 161-164]

21 The secret sauce of the parent-as-consultant model has these simple ingredients:

1. Offer help (like tutoring or psychotherapy) to kids, but don't push it on them (unless kids are seriously depressed, abusing drugs, or deeply in denial about their problems).

2. Offer to share your knowledge, experience, and wisdom, but don't try to lay it on kids whether they want it or not.

3. So long as they are willing to consider other perspectives, encourage kids to make their own decisions, and go with their decisions unless almost any sensible person would say that they are crazy. A decision is not irrational simply because you don't agree with it!

4. Offer to help them solve their problems if they need it and provide emotional support when they're upset, but don't rush to rescue them. Kids develop resilience through experiencing stress, trying to cope with it, and then having time to recover. If we solve problems for them, we condition kids to look to us for solutions rather than within themselves. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 39-40]

22 Just as the young child crafted a sense of self out of the "mirror" of the mother, teens this age [12 to 14] craft a sense of self out of the mirror of their peers. The shifting allegiances of teens at this age make the reliability of this mirror quite poor, only adding to the young teen's confusion about how she measures up in the world. It is critical that parents bear in mind that this is a temporary state of affairs and that in spite of

appearances to the contrary, kids this age are very dependent on their parents for a sense of well-being. ...

It is important for parents to work at maintaining connection with their young teens in spite of the protest, and even rejection, typical of this age. Eye rolling passes, but the protection that parental involvement confers lasts a lifetime. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 116]

23 A child will have many friends, but only two parents—if that—and parents are more, not less, than friends. Friends have a very limited authority to correct. Every parent therefore needs to learn to tolerate the momentary anger or even hatred directed towards them by their children, after necessary corrective action has been taken, as the capacity of children to perceive or care about long-term consequences is very limited. [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, pp. 123-124]

24 Parents who cannot tolerate the unhappiness of their child will be compelled to endure his unhappiness as an adult. [Thomas Szasz, *Words to the Wise*, Transaction, 2004, p. 137]

25 [W]e can let our kids know we appreciate how important it is for them to be around their peers. We can explain to them that as they move through adolescence, they are sculpting their adult brain, and that they should embrace that responsibility. We should respectfully inform them about the effect of chemicals on the developing brain. We can encourage them to prioritize sleep, because sleeping enough will make them less impulsive. And we can encourage them to become black belts in the art of stress management, because when kids aren't stressed, they make better decisions. Parents can also work to keep the relationship close—no easy task when teens act in rash ways. Finally, parents can remind their kids that ultimately, they have to police their own behavior. No kid wants to hurt someone in an accident or screw up their life. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 62-63]

26 Being a nonanxious presence means not being burdened by excessive worry or fearfulness, not being highly reactive emotionally, and having a courageous attitude toward dealing with life's challenges. When we can be a nonanxious presence, we're better able to support autonomy in our kids, to tolerate the stress we feel when they take on challenges or when they struggle, and to help them learn to manage their own anxiety. ...

When we are a nonaxious presence, we help kids achieve *sustainable* self-development, by communicating messages such as:

"The world is actually a pretty safe place." ... "I love you no matter what you do or say or achieve." "You're capable of managing your own life." ... "Screwing stuff up is a necessary part of learning to do things well." ... "There are thousands of ways to become successful in this world." "Life isn't a race; the world is full of late bloomers." ...

A nonanxious presence is a different way of looking at things, a way that will make *you* less likely to feel burned out and pressured. ... Our goal is to make it easier for you to keep things in perspective, so that you radiate calm, courage, and confidence, rather than fear and doubt. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 68-70]

27 *Asking questions*—particularly ones that launch us into joint problem-solving, collaborative-troubleshooting mode—can show young people that we need to work together to understand the mismatch of priorities. Questions also send a respectful signal that we as parents aren't simply demanding that our children comply and suppress their feelings. Instead, we legitimize children's perspectives and demonstrate a willingness to work with them. ...

Again and again, I saw that *questioning*, rather than *telling*, constituted a core mentor-mindset practice. ...

In an *authentic question*, the question asker does not know the answer and legitimately wants to know the answer. ... A question *with uptake* means that the asker has been influenced by, or incorporated, information from the answerer. ...

Authentic questions with uptake are effective, in part, because they build *relationships* ... they create a common ground and a sense of collaboration. [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The*

Science of Motivating Young People, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 147, 156-157]

28 *Understand and address the underlying cause of the child's behavior; don't just respond to the behavior.* [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, p. 150]

29 [W]e need clear recognition that *character education depends on our relationship with our children and that character traits cannot be transmitted by words but must be conveyed by actions.*

The first step in the long-term program is a determination to become *interested in what children are thinking and feeling, and respond not just to their behavior, their outward compliance or rebellion, but to the feelings that trigger that behavior*.

How can we become aware of what children think and feel? Children give us clues. Their feelings come through in word and in tone, in gesture and in posture. All we need is an ear to listen, an eye to behold, and a heart to feel. *Our inner motto is: Let me understand. Let me show that I understand. Let me show in words that do not criticize or condemn.* [Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, 1965, Three Rivers, 2003, pp. 79-80]

30 [C]hanging how we see things helps us resolve problems because kids (and adults) tend to react to the meaning of a situation, not its reality. They think, *I'm upset because the situation is objectively terrible.* They rarely consider, *I'm upset because how I'm seeing the situation is a problem, but I could choose to see the situation differently, and that would help me achieve my goals.* ...

Lorena Seidel has a beautiful little routine she teaches parents to follow when in conflict with kids. She gives them a six-question guide for coauthoring a treaty in the war over meaning. ...

The first three questions help the child recognize that their way of seeing things poses a problem. [1. What does this mean to you? 2. How is that meaning making you feel? 3. Is that serving your goals?] The second three questions help them come up with a better, more motivating way of seeing things. [4. What's something else it could mean? 5. How

would it make you feel if you thought that? 6. Would that serve your goals?] [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 163-164]

31 [Stanley Coopersmith] found five conditions associated with high self-esteem in children:

1. The child experiences total acceptance of thoughts, feelings, and the value of his or her person.

2. The child operates in a context of clearly defined and enforced limits that are fair, nonoppressive, and negotiable. The child is not given unrestricted "freedom." Consequently, the child experiences a sense of security, there is a clear basis for evaluating his or her behavior. Further, the limits generally entail high standards, as well as confidence that the child will be able to meet them. ...

3. The child experiences respect for his or her dignity as a human being. The parents do not use violence or humiliation or ridicule to control and manipulate. The parents take the child's needs and wishes seriously, whether or not they can accede to them in a particular instance. The parents are willing to negotiate family rules within carefully drawn limits. In other words, authority, but not authoritarianism, is operating.

As an expression of this overall attitude, parents are ... more inclined to put the emphasis on rewarding and reinforcing positive behavior. They focus on what they do want rather than on what they do not want—on the positive rather than the negative.

The parent shows an interest in the child, in his or her social and academic life, and they are generally available for discussion when and as the child wants it.

4. The parents uphold high standards and high expectations in terms of behavior and performance. Their attitude is not "anything goes." They have both moral and performance expectations that they convey in a respectful, benevolent, and nonoppresive manner; the child is challenged to be the best he or she can be.

5. The parents themselves tend to enjoy a high level of self-esteem. They model (what I call) self-efficacy and self-respect. The child sees living examples of that which he or she needs to learn. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 172-173]

32 Our prior learning (what the society and our family and our own individual experiences have taught us) can create mental models that are the perceptual filters that skew our view of present experience ... Expectations become fixed, and mental "shoulds" distort what we are open to seeing and accepting. ...

We as parents need to be very conscious of the depths of our responses to unexpected developments with our children so that we don't unwittingly make them feel judged, condemned, or even invisible. All of these things can inhibit our ability to be present and can threaten trust in our relationship with our child. ...

We can work on being present in an approach that lets go of our expectational mind-sets, our previously created judgments, ... and bring into perceptions a more direct, unfiltered input of what is. [Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, Penguin, 2013, pp. 251-252]

33 Listen to how you speak to yourself. ... Is the voice that runs commentary on your day a harsh and critical one, or does it treat you kindly? This is the same voice that our children hear every day of their lives. Were your own parents critical of you, and if they were, do you continue to "hear" them talking to you in denigrating, belittling ways? If so, then you need to work on developing a new and softer voice to guide you through the day, and also to talk to your children. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 151-152]

34 [T]o educate rightly is not a simple and easy thing, but a complex and extremely difficult thing: the hardest task which devolves upon adult life. ... [I]f you would carry out with success a rational and civilized system, you must be prepared for considerable mental exertion—for some study, some ingenuity, some patience, some self-control. ... Not only will you have constantly to analyze the motives of your children, but you will have to analyze your own motives—to discriminate between those internal suggestions springing from a true parental solicitude, and those which spring from your own selfishness, from your love of ease, from your lust of dominion. And then, more trying still, you will have not only to detect, but to curb these baser impulses. In brief, you will have to carry on your higher education at the same time that you are educating your children. Intellectually you must cultivate to good purpose that most complex of subjects—human nature and its laws, as exhibited in your children, in yourself, and in

the world. [Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical*, 1860, D. Appleton, 1896, pp. 215-217, https://archive.org/details/spencereducation00spen]

35 We must love and protect our own development with the same zeal and seriousness of purpose that we bring to the protection of our children. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 224]

36 Separating your own happiness from your child's is a lifelong pursuit, but it's one of the best practices you can begin for your own benefit and for your child's. ... [I]f we believe that our mental state is inextricably linked to theirs, it leads to enmeshment or codependency—and can allow kids' challenges to use up way too much of a family's oxygen. ... There's a temptation to think, *If my child is struggling, what does that say about me?* But remember, your children are raised by you, but they are not you. Your identity needs to be multipronged for everyone's sake. If your happiness cannot begin until your kid is happy, you might push your kids to "get better now," fraying your relationship and your ability to help. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 86-87]

37 Perhaps we have become so seduced by the possibility of being able to cultivate "outstanding" children because we are a bit lost ourselves. ... We hunker down and immerse ourselves in our children's activities at the expense of our adult relationships and our own continued development. Decreasing the sphere of our own lives makes us increasingly dependent on our children for a sense of meaning and accomplishment. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, p. 38]

38 [P]arents [should] make enjoying their kids their top priority so that their kids would have the experience of being joy-producing organisms.

Once that priority of enjoyment is set, work backward. If you're not enjoying your children because of unresolved anger, focus on resolving that anger. ... If you're not enjoying your kids because you're not getting enough social support, socialize more. Or perhaps you're not enjoying your kids because you're spending *too much* time with

them. Our highest goal in life isn't to make our kids feel good—but it's worth paying attention to what's blocking you from genuinely enjoying them and removing it. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 96]

39 Psychologists now know that parents whose children are good at self-regulation lay this foundation by doing three things very well from the start. They are *warm*, they are *firm*, and they are *supportive* of their child's growing sense of self-reliance. ...

[W]hen children feel loved, they develop a strong sense that the world is a safe and benevolent place. This allows them to function away from their parents without worrying that trouble lurks around every corner. ...

You cannot love your child too much. ... Some parents believe that holding back love helps develop a child's character. In fact, just the opposite is true. When children feel genuinely loved, they're almost always less needy.

Be physically affectionate. ...

Try to understand and respond to your child's emotional needs. ... [This] entails observing your child's moods carefully and reacting in ways that help his emotional development. Children's emotional needs change as they develop. ... [D]uring adolescence, being responsive means helping to foster your teenager's confidence in his or her ability to function independently by providing opportunities for meaningful decision making.

Provide a safe haven. Children need to feel that their home is a place where they can retreat from the tensions and pressures of everyday life. ...

Be involved in your child's life. The strongest and most consistent predictor of children's mental health, adjustment, happiness, and well-being is the degree to which their parents are involved in their lives. ...

Don't be overly intrusive. Part of what makes a child healthy, happy, and successful is developing a sense of mastery and self-sufficiency. ... Ultimately, the only way your child can develop a strong sense of self-regulation is if you give him the freedom to venture out and make some of his own decisions, even if this exposes him to hurt or disappointment. Good parenting requires a balance between involvement and independence. ...

Relinquish control gradually, as your child gets better at managing her own life. Remember that the development of self-regulation depends on the progressive exchange of external control (imposed by a parent or other adult) for self-control. ...

Help your child think through decisions rather than making them for him. ...

Protect when you must, but permit when you can. In order to develop competence, children need to learn from their mistakes. Many parents have trouble letting this happen, because our natural inclination is to protect our children from harm, failure, or disappointment. ... [T]ry to maximize your child's autonomy so long as doing do doesn't jeopardize his health, well-being, or future. [Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, pp. 125-128, 132-135]

40 If possible, keep both parents about equally involved in your son's upbringing—whether married, divorced, or never married. If impossible, get your son involved in the Boy Scouts, Mankind Project, or [other] programs ...

Don't set any boundaries you do not enforce. ...

Impart a sense of sacredness for family dinner nights ...

Discuss at dinner meaningful life issues and dilemmas, and issues in the kids' lives; make sure no one dominates, and interruption is taboo. Your advice comes last, and is discretionary.

Make no topic taboo at dinner. Boys love to be challenged; they'd rather only half-understand a conversation than be bored. ...

Use the invitation of friends (yours and his) to occasional family dinner nights to help your family develop a supportive social network and a leadership group for self-discovery. ...

Develop questions you ask your son about every new friend ... Is that friend someone you respect? Why? What does that person encourage in you that you feel will make you a better person? Is there anything that magnetically attracts you to her or him that you feel may lead you to a place (physically or psychologically) that you will ultimately regret? Do you think this person will be a trusted friend five years from now?

> Make exercise part of your son's daily life—not as an option, but as a top priority. ...
>
> Introduce him to meditation, yoga, and prayer, and do them with him. ...
>
> Teach him to listen to music that soothes, and seek to understand why he loves the music he loves. Ask him to listen to why you love the music you love.
>
> Create enough pressure to teach him how to handle pressure. Frame "failure" as a prerequisite to success—part of the gift of risk-taking and being a man. ...
>
> Treat the family as a team, with your son's chores and consciousness of your needs being what gets him to "make the team." ... Let him know the benefit to him: parents who are less stressed contribute to happier, more successful children. [Warren Farrell and John Gray, *The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*, BenBella Books, 2018, pp. 270-271]

Related:
– How can we foster self-directed learning in others?
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– How do adult expectations influence young people?
– What constitutes mental health? How should we be educated to this end?

15. How can we foster self-directed learning in others?

1 How does a teacher aid discovery and elicit the activity of the student's mind? By inviting and entertaining questions, by encouraging and sustaining inquiry, by supervising helpfully a wide variety of exercises and drills, by leading discussions, by giving examinations that arouse constructive responses ... [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, p. 50]

2 Left to his own devices, the learner would not get very far unless he asked himself questions, perceived problems to be solved, suffered puzzlement over dilemmas, put himself under the necessity of following out the implications of this hypothesis or that, made observations and weighed the evidence for alternative hypotheses, and so on. The teachers, aware of these indispensable steps in the process by which he himself has moved his own mind up the ladder of learning, devises ways to help another individual engage in a similar process; and he applies them with sensitivity to the state of that other person's mind and with awareness of whatever special difficulties the other must overcome in order to make headway. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 170]

3 No one can act or learn for another. The do-er must do the work himself. The task, the choice, the purpose must be his. But a t-eacher may be able to help in many ways. ...

He breaks down the large task so that whatever he may ask the student to do, the student, with effort, will be able to do, and from doing it will get greater powers, with which to do the next task. He gives a model, shows what is to be done. He may say something that will make it easier for the student to know and do what is to be done. He gives feedback, makes the student see and feel what in fact he did. He makes a correction, shows the student the difference between what he did and what he was supposed to do, and shows how to close that difference. Most important, by doing this, he tries to give the student (or help him make for himself) standards, criteria, a heightened awareness, a model in his own mind/body, from which he will in time get his own instructions, feedback, and correction. Thus, as he sharpens the student's movements, he sharpens the criteria by which the student will later judge and correct his own movements. The true master does not want to make the student into a slave or

puppet, but into a new master. He is not a behavior modifier. He does not move the student by imperceptible steps toward an end which only he, the master, can see. He seeks instead to give the student greater control of his own behavior, so that he may move himself toward his own ends ... [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 57-58]

4 Sometimes in guiding, skill is not involved, only taste. If one person asks another to suggest a good book to read, piece of music to listen to, or movie or play to see, the other will say, "What sort of stuff do you like?" ... In short, when a teacher wants to help a student explore some piece of reality, whether geographic, athletic, artistic, or intellectual, he must begin by finding out where the student is now. ...

This is the only legitimate use of tests—to find out where a student is, so that the t-eacher may better order his tasks, or help him explore. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 80]

5 One of the central features of being autonomy supportive is providing choice, which entails sharing the authority or power of your one-up position. ...

When choice is offered, of course, it is essential that the person being offered choice have the information necessary for making a meaningful decision. ... To experience a sense of choice, you need to know (or be able to find out) the possibilities, the constraints, the hidden features. Without such information, being given a choice will feel more like a burden than a support for autonomy. It may well engender anxiety, and without adequate information, people are more likely to make mistakes. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 144, 36]

6 [W]hen we say we want children and teens to make their own decisions as much as possible, what we really want is for them to make *informed* decisions. It's our responsibility as parents to give the information and the perspective that we have—and that they lack—in order to enable them to make the best possible choices. Once properly informed, kids usually do make good decisions for themselves—and their decisions are almost always as good as or better than our own. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 55]

7 Because it's impossible to make a truly resistant kid practice, and because chronically fighting about anything is not healthy for families, we recommend taking the same approach that we recommend for homework: consult, but don't force.

Explain to your child how important music is to you and your family. Let him know that for many people, it brings great happiness and satisfaction. Tell him that although it's a lot of work, it's worth it if you learn to play. Tell him you want him to be able to play, that you're willing to pay for lessons as long as his teacher says he's practicing enough, and that you're willing to help in any way you can to make practicing an enjoyable experience. But as with homework, also tell him that you're not willing to fight with him about practicing because you love him and don't want a constant hassle at home—and you don't want to ruin music for him by making it nothing but a chore. If the child starts lessons, offer to help him develop a practice schedule. Tell him that you're willing to sit with him during practice time and that if he wants to practice but just can't make himself do it, you'll offer a little incentive. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 43-44]

8 Virtually everyone who has written about the psychology of success agrees that setting goals is fundamental. Both of us have used goal-setting and visualization strategies to develop our businesses, and we urge you to teach your kids to do this from a young age. For some, writing a simple list of goals works well. For others, it is much more effective to have a visual picture of their goals to refer to. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 223]

9 By envisioning alternative futures and creating backup plans, kids (and their parents) learn that if Plan A doesn't work, the world won't come to an end. ... Over time, practicing Plan B thinking will give you confidence that you can handle stress and setbacks. ...

For some, Plan B thinking may include considering radically different routes to success. Hearing stories about those who have developed meaningful, happy lives by following different paths is one of the greatest sources of perspective-giving solace we can offer ... [J]ust knowing that alternative happy endings are out there and widening the frame a bit can go a long way toward alleviating stress. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The*

Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives, Viking, 2018, pp. 231-232]

10 What a teacher *can* do—*all* a teacher can do—is work with students to create a classroom culture, a climate, a curriculum that will nourish and sustain the fundamental inclinations that everyone starts out with: to make sense of oneself and the world, to become increasingly competent at tasks that are regarded as consequential, to connect with (and express oneself to) other people. Motivation—at least intrinsic motivation—is something to be supported, or if necessary revived. It's not something we can instill in students by acting on them in a certain way. You can tap their motivation, in other words, but you can't "motivate them." And if you think this distinction is merely semantic, then I'm afraid we disagree. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 87-88]

11 [A] young man should not just be told that he is capable of more than he thinks he can do, but rather a set of circumstances must be devised in which he demonstrates such competence to himself. [Francis J. Kelly and Daniel J. Baer, 1969, quoted by Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, pp. 106-107]

12 It would be better if you could regard your job ... not as the *instructor* who organizes the learning that students are supposed to do but as the *guide* who makes what we would like students to learn interesting, comprehensible, and accessible. [Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Teachers College Press, 1998, p. 80]

13 [T]he mentor mindset, is to have high standards plus high support. Upholding high standards can help maintain order and prevent the feared descent into chaos. Simultaneously, the high levels of support convey how much we care for young people. By taking young people seriously and giving them the support they need to earn impressive reputations, we give them a route to status and respect. They get to earn prestige, which they need far more than a self-esteem puff-up. ...

[T]o say that the young want respect is to say that they want to be admired by people whose opinions they care about. They obtain this admiration by showing their skills to other members of the group. ...

An effective mentor creates opportunities for young people to learn about, and begin to acquire, what counts for status in a valued social group. ... Mentors don't take over and do things for young people, like the protector. Nor do mentors uphold impossible standards so that few are successful, like the enforcer. Instead, they find ways for young people to earn respectworthy reputations. [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 64,75]

14 Children, like grown-ups, enjoy the sense of achievement derived from mastering a difficulty, but this requires a consistency of effort of which few are capable without some outside encouragement. The capacity for consistent self-direction is one of the most valuable that a human being can possess. It is practically unknown in young children, and is never developed either by a very rigid discipline or by complete freedom. Very rigid discipline, such as that of soldiers in war-time, makes a man incapable of acting without the goad of external command. On the other hand, complete freedom throughout childhood does not teach him to resist the solicitations of a momentary impulse: he does not acquire the capacity of concentrating upon one matter when he is interested in another, or of resisting pleasures because they will cause fatigue that will interfere with subsequent work. The strengthening of the will demands, therefore, a somewhat subtle mixture of freedom and discipline, and is destroyed by an excess of either. [Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, 1932, Routledge Classics, 2009, p. 23]

15 There is no ground for holding that the teacher should not suggest anything to the child until he has *consciously* expressed a want in that direction. A sympathetic teacher is quite likely to know more clearly than the child himself what his own instincts are and mean. But the suggestion must *fit in* with the dominant mode of growth in the child; it must serve simply as stimulus to bring forth more adequately what the child is already blindly striving to do. Only by watching the child and seeing the attitude that he assumes toward suggestions can we tell whether they are operating as factors in furthering the child's growth, or whether they are external, arbitrary impositions interfering with normal growth. ...

Nothing is more absurd than to suppose that there is no middle term between leaving a child to his own unguided fancies and likes or controlling his activities by a formal succession of dictated directions. As just intimated, it is the teacher's business to know what powers are striving for utterance at a given period in the child's development, and what sorts of activity will bring these to helpful expression, in order then to supply the requisite stimuli and needed materials. [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, p. 125, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

16 I am entirely confident in asserting that the urgent project for parents today, in this world of increasing economic, cultural, and social uncertainty, is to help their children gain a wholesome sense of direction that will carry them through the minefields of drift, confusion, apathy, anxiety, fear, and self-absorption that threaten their generation. I am also convinced that the key to this sense of direction is finding a life purpose. ...

What a parent *should* do is lead a child toward promising options. A parent can help a child sort through choices and reflect upon how the child's talents and interests match up with the world's opportunities and needs. A parent can support a child's own efforts to explore purposeful directions, and open up more potential sources of discovery about possible purposes. These are supporting roles rather than leading ones, because center stage in this drama belongs to the child. But while the most effective assistance parents can provide is indirect, it is also invaluable. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 130-131]

17 Every time we turn away from our child's interests, dismiss them, or denigrate them, we lessen our child's capacity for enthusiasm *and* lessen the connection between us. ...

[W]hat is likely to be valued in that future can be hard to predict. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, p. 197]

18 Parents should listen with interest to all the new ideas their children bring home, exploring whatever possibilities for developing the ideas child and parent can imagine together. ...

[T]o be effective, parents should make sure that these conversations are two- or three-way (or many-way) dialogues, rather than simply adult-driven monologues. During such conversations parents must learn to be good listeners and, what's more, *good*

> *interviewers*, probing children to elaborate their views, frequently asking the *Why* question, and encouraging them to think more deeply about the things they find noteworthy and interesting. When we evoke from children their own nascent ideas about what they find meaningful, we become better able to hear their first murmurs of purpose; and in this way we provide the nurturing conditions for further exploration. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 139-141]

19

> [F]rom our extensive studies of where a sense of purpose in life comes from in young people, let us summarize the set of factors that we have identified as crucial. ...
>
> Listen closely for the spark, then fan the flames. Take advantage of regular opportunities to open a dialogue. Be open-minded and supportive of the sparks of interest expressed. Convey your own sense of purpose and the meaning you derive from your work. Impart wisdom about the practicalities in life. Introduce children to potential mentors. Encourage an entrepreneurial attitude. Nurture a positive outlook. Instill in children a feeling of agency, linked to responsibility. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 158-159]

Related:
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn?

16. Do we really value education? Why do we value it?

1 [O]ur society conveys decided ambivalence about the role of schools and the value of education. On the rhetorical level, of course, there is little disagreement. Education is vital; schools are central. Presidents wrap themselves in the mantle (and the argot) of education. As if to endorse this viewpoint, the well-to-do spend huge sums of money on private school and universities, in order to purchase a margin of advantage for their children in later life.

And yet the extent to which education is genuinely valued in our society can be doubted, and in fact it has been called into question for many decades. America is a country where one can achieve virtually unlimited success without formal education. It is also a country where it has long been prudent to hide the extent of one's education and to honor those who embrace an anti-intellectual or even an anti-educational stance. Lessons on the street and in the media are decidedly nonscholastic: "Street smarts" are more important than "school smarts," professors are absentminded, students are spoiled, book-learning won't get you anywhere. At the very least, those growing up in our culture receive decidedly mixed messages about education. [Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Basic Books, 1991, pp. 256-257]

2 Anybody in our culture who suggested that we did not love our children would be hated; and in harmony with our love of children we want them to have the best education available. Of course, it has to be the best education available for the money we are willing to spend, and we all know that in calculating the amount of money we are able—or rather, are willing—to spend on education, the family standard of living comes first. That is to say, after we have calculated expenditures for food, drink, entertainment, the kind of clothes that will present us and our children to the world in conformity with our class position ... I say, after we have calculated all these expenses—not to mention taxes to state and federal governments—we are willing to give our children the best education to be bought with the money that's left over. Obviously not much is, and the continued defeat of one school bond issue after the other is witness to the contradiction between educational goals and the living-standard. Thus education, the very phenomenon that made a rising living standard possible, is being undermined by it.

> Let us put it even more clearly: as far as education is concerned, war, a good time and the living standard eat up so much that, in their education, the kids get the crumbs that fall from the table. Educational crumbs can only be educational incompetence. On the other hand, in a deeper sense, our children get the best education compatible with a society that requires a high level of stupidity in order to exist as it is. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, pp. 21-22]

3 > Americans spend 0.2% of their income on *all* reading materials, barely more than $100 per family per year. ... Today's American's spend about four times as much on tobacco and five times as much on alcohol as they do on reading. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 245]

4 > The educational system that any country has will be the system that country wants. It will be, in general, adapted to the needs and ideals of that country as they are interpreted at any given time. ...
>
> You may be sure, therefore, that the American educational system will be engaged in the cultivation of whatever is honored in the United States. Its weaknesses will be the weaknesses of American ideals. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 48-49, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

5 > We probably have as good an educational program today in this country as we deserve, according to our cultural attainments and aspirations. ... The reform in which I am interested must work against the tide, challenging the worst, and also the most obdurate, features of our national ethos—our materialism, our pragmatism, our modernism. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 78-79]

6 > [T]he reigning values of our society are hardly congenial to [education] reform. ... Above all, money-making and other external indices of social success must become subordinate to the inner attainments of moral and intellectual virtue. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 314]

7 The intellectual tradition in which we live receives merely incidental attention. There is no particular reason for talking about intellectual development if what you are concerned with is financial success, for there is little evidence of any correlation between the two. I do not deny that the law schools have manufactured some very crafty fellows and that the engineering schools have graduated some smart mechanics. I do deny that either the public schools or the universities are devoting themselves to producing people who have had genuine intellectual discipline and who have acquired those intellectual habits which the ancients properly denominated virtues. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 56-57, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

8 Every teacher in a public school system, for example, knows that if he asserts his self the probabilities of getting a rise or even keeping his job are reduced. But behind the principal who makes this clear to him is a superintendent who can punish the principal; and behind the superintendent is a board of education, while behind them is a state department of education ready to punish them all. Behind the state department are the people. Now the circle is complete, for the people, after all, are interested largely in preserving their good names. Since so many among them have given up self-striving, why should they allow it to anybody else? Furthermore they are frightened about what might happen to their non-conforming children. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, p. 13]

9 The great problem of our time is moral, intellectual, and spiritual. With a superfluity of goods we are sinking into poverty. With a multitude of gadgets we are no happier than we were before. With a declining death rate we have yet to discover what to do with our lives. With a hatred of war we are now deeply engaged in the greatest war in history. With a love of liberty we see much of the world in chains.

How can these things be? They can be because we have directed our lives and our education to means instead of ends. We have been concerned with the transitory and superficial instead of the enduring and basic problems of life and of society. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 91-92, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

10 On the measure of academic engagement, the United States scored only at the international average, and far lower than our chief economic rivals: China, Korea, Japan, and Germany. In these countries, students show up for school and attend their classes more reliably than anywhere else in the world.

On the measure of social engagement, the United States topped all four of these economic competitors except Germany.

In America, high school is for socializing. It's a country club for kids, where the really important activities are interrupted by all those annoying classes. ...

For all but the very best American Students ... high school is tedious and unchallenging. ... The majority of American high-school students say they are just going through the motions at school, calibrating their level of effort to ensure that they do well enough to stay out of academic trouble. One-third of American high-school students report that they have little interest in school and get through the day by fooling around with their friends. [Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, pp. 142-143]

11 The fundamental problem with American high-school achievement is not our schools. If parents don't raise their children in ways that enable them to maintain interest in what their teachers are teaching, it doesn't matter who the teachers are, how they teach, what they teach, or how much they're paid. Without changing the culture of student achievement, changes in instructors or instruction won't, and can't, make a difference. ...

High-school students from many Asian and European countries outperform their American counterparts mainly because the cultures of achievement are very different in these other countries. These cultures give rise to higher expectations at home and more support for achievement within the adolescent peer group. In addition, in many other countries, especially in Asia, parents demand much more self-control from their children at much younger ages. By the time children in other cultures have matured into adulthood, they have much stronger self-control than Americans do. [Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 146]

12 Adolescence, as we have seen, is a time during which brain systems that process social information become more easily aroused, which is an especially strong liability in a school environment that places undue emphasis on peer relations, as is the case in the United States. At an age when the admiration of one's peers takes on special salience, students in other countries benefit from a peer culture that respects academic achievement, rather than one that derides it, like that in most American high schools. [Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, p. 148]

13 The West has not accepted the proposition that the democratic ideal demands liberal education for all. In the United States, at least, the prevailing opinion seems to be that the demands of that ideal are met by universal schooling, rather than by universal liberal education. What goes on in school is regarded as of relatively minor importance. The object appears to be to keep the child off the labor market and to detain him in comparatively sanitary surroundings until we are ready to have him go to work. [Robert M. Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, pp. 24-25, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

14 [K]eep in mind that in the United States almost nobody who reads, writes, or does arithmetic gets much respect. We are a land of talkers; we pay talkers the most and admire talkers the most and so our children talk constantly, following the public models of television and schoolteachers. It is very difficult to teach the "basics" anymore because they really aren't basic to the society we've made. [John Gatto, "The Psychopathic School," 1990, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, p. 24]

15 A large proportion of the students and staff come from social groups in which the authority of the mind and its work is simply not accepted. From the arts they expect diversion and decoration; from the sciences the solution to technical problems; they demand these quickly and under all conditions without back talk. They have had no experiences of the arts and sciences as elucidators of life, and mishandle and emasculate them in such a way that their power to serve is impaired or destroyed. [Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, p. 96]

16 Behaviorism is as American as rewarding children with apple pie. We're a busy people, with fortunes to make and lands to conquer. We don't have time for theories or complications: Just give us techniques that work. ... [I]f imposing a scripted, mind-numbing curriculum succeeds in raising students' test scores; if relying on bribes and threats succeeds in making children obey, then there's no need to ask, "But for how long does it work? And at what cost?" [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 171-172]

17 The rise of the Internet undercuts the Machiavellian line that intellectual force-feeding ultimately blossoms into sincere appreciation. Today's adults are the product of over a decade of mandatory exposure to abstract ideas and high culture. If educational force-feeding worked well, most educated adults would adore these nerdy realms—and eagerly tap the Internet to revisit them. To understate, they rarely do. ...

[T]he Internet proves low consumption of ideas and culture stems from apathy, not poverty or inconvenience. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 260-261, 242]

18 No one is sitting on the free energies of youth, from atop positions of power and censorship in society, as did the rulers of eighteenth-century Europe, controlling publication and education, in the interests of keeping that power. No, no one is holding back the freeing force of liberal education from above. It is coming from much deeper—from down below: It is the collective anxieties of the masses of men against all serious change in their way of life; it is man everywhere joined in dedication to the habitual way of life, with its promise of continued survival and a modicum of pleasure ... [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, p. 42]

19 If, as estimated, many children spend thirty hours a week in front of the screen and neglect homework (supposing they are given any), it is because parents are indifferent or feel powerless, but also because they have no clear idea of what a school can and should do. They are, after all, the products of that same, ineffectual, incoherent schooling. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, U of Chicago P, 1991, p. 41]

20 [W]ith best intentions, adults in recent years have been busy talking young people out of their natural idealism and into a posture of heightened material concern. Often this is done out of a sense of fearful expedience, for the sake of helping the young person get ahead in today's competitive marketplace. Such a stance is shaky for young people not only because it is unnatural for their period of life but also because it has no sustaining conviction of its own. It is a timid and pessimistic stance that inspires neither wholehearted effort nor lasting allegiance. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 106-107]

21 The truth is that school cannot exist without *some* reason for its being, and in fact there are several gods our students are presently asked to serve. ... [E]ach is incapable of sustaining, with richness, seriousness, and durability, the idea of a public school. ...

[T]he first narrative ... may properly go by the name of the god of Economic Utility. As its name suggests, it is a passionless god, cold and severe. But it makes a promise, and not a trivial one. Addressing the young, it offers a covenant of sorts with them: If you will pay attention in school, and do your homework, and score well on tests, and behave yourself, you will be rewarded with a well-paying job when you are done. ...

[M]any parents ... are apt to like the idea of school as a primary training ground for future employment, as do many corporate executives. This is why the story of Economic Utility is told and retold in television commercials and political speeches as the reason why children should go to school, and stay in school, and why schools should receive public support. ...

One may well wonder, then, why this god has so much strength ... I believe the reason is that the god of Economic Utility is coupled with another god, one with a smiling face and one that provides an answer to the question, If I get a good job, then what?

I refer here to the god of Consumership, whose basic moral axiom is expressed in the slogan "Whoever dies with the most toys, wins"—that is to say, goodness inheres in those who buy things; evil in those who do not. ...

Devotion to the god of Consumership serves easily as the metaphysical basis of schooling because it is urged on the young early in their lives, long before they get to school—in fact, as soon as they are exposed to the powerful teachings of the advertising industry. ...

One would think that our schools would ... be in explicit opposition to such a god, since education is supposed to free the young from the bondage of crude materialism. But, in fact, many of our schools, especially in recent times, have allied themselves with this god in a most emphatic way. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 27-35]

22 Since what a man is in our society is so largely defined both by himself and by others in terms of what he does for a living, vocational education is in fact an indispensable part of liberal education ...

What [liberal education] cannot do is serve students who are interested in the job purely for external reasons. ... Any fundamental improvement in American education, therefore, depends on weakening the present total connection in the minds of both students and teachers between schooling and economic opportunity. ... One of the most objectionable features of [our] society is precisely that it does lead people to expect nothing of education—and, indeed, to accept nothing from it—except assistance in getting on. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage / Random House, 1965, pp. 224-226]

23 Many parents have the wrong expectation of the profit to be derived from schooling. They think the only purpose of schools is to prepare their children to earn a living. While that certainly is an objective to be served, it is, in terms of human values, less important than preparation for citizenship and for leading a richly rewarding, good human life. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 313]

24 The speaker asked the audience what they wanted for their children. People said things like, "We want our children to be happy." "We want our children to be healthy," "We want them to have good relationships." Then she told us that children say that their parents want them to have a big house, an expensive car, and the right high-paying job. There's a real disconnect between what we're ... wishing ... and the message that's really being sent. We were at a point where we wanted integrity in every part of our life, and we realized that we needed to change everything. [Lisa Labon, homeschooling mother of four, quoted by Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, p. 171]

25 [M]any parents don't explicitly talk to their kids about happiness at all. ... [S]o kids form their impressions about it from listening to their parents emphasize the importance of grades and building a résumé for college. They supplement this with messages from their peers, teachers, or the culture around them, which, by and large, promotes materialism and photographic evidence that *Hey! Look! My life is great!* Kids get the message that money really matters, that happiness requires wealth and great career success, and that others' perception of your wealth and status is crucial.

Many parents we meet share the view that the key to a good life *is* getting into a good college, no matter what, because that good college will lead to a good job, financial security, and happiness ad infinitum. ...

The problem is that we tend to be very poor predictors of what actually makes us happy. We think that having more money, getting a big promotion, or buying new stuff will make us happy when, in fact, we're happier if we prioritize having time more than things, giving more than getting, and appreciating what we have more than trying to get what we don't. [Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness*, 2006] So when we equate academic achievement and career success with happiness, we do so potentially at the cost of our kids' well-being. Considering the marked increase over the last several years in incidence of suicide among high-achieving kids and young adults, it appears that depression and hopelessness have no respect for accomplishment. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 184-185]

26 Ask any audience of parents this question: "How would you define success for your children when they've grown up?" Without fail the responses are primarily internally cultivated qualities like independence, integrity, generosity, passion, self-confidence, and healthy relationships. A notably healthy list of attributes. But when children and teens are asked, "How will you define success when you grow up?" The answer is quick and inevitable—"Making a lot of money." Now, I have no doubt that we are all sincere when we say that our most important goal for our children is for them to be emotionally healthy, responsible, and contributing members of society. Yet somehow our children are taking in a very different message. Making lots of money is fine, but as a definition of success it is likely to leave our children, and the adults they will ultimately become, disappointed and disengaged. Money buys many things, but typically not a sense of either authenticity or meaning.

Of course, we are not the only influences in our children's lives. Messages about the importance of money are both explicit and implicit in our culture. ... Americans have long been notoriously poor savers, predictably choosing to consume rather than save. And our recent financial troubles have underscored the relative invulnerability of the wealthy and the extreme vulnerability of the less well-off. Small wonder that our kids come to see money as the greatest indicator of success and security.

Although culture certainly influences our kids' beliefs, when it comes to core values, parents generally exert a stronger influence. So why aren't our beliefs about what it takes to have a successful life getting through to our kids? Are we sending mixed messages ... ? [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 248-250]

27 It was not money per se that impaired [my patient's] development; rather it was a parenting style that emphasized the importance of external motivation while promoting materialism as a substitute for the hard personal and interpersonal work that adolescence demands. ... [This] transmits poor values and leaves our kids in the lurch emotionally because it encourages them to forgo the development of internal motivation, keeping them dependent on others and on material goods for a sense of self. ...

We don't necessarily contribute to our children's emotional problems when we buy them cars or expensive clothes or high-end vacations; we contribute when they believe, either by observing our behavior or our values, that these are the things that matter most in life. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 45, 48]



28 The right kind of education does not depend on the regulations of any government or the methods of any particular system; it lies in our own hands, in the hands of the parents and the teachers.

If parents really cared for their children, they would build a new society; but fundamentally most parents do not care, and so they have no time for this most urgent problem. They have time for making money, for amusements, for rituals and worship, but no time to consider what is the right kind of education for their children. This is a fact that the majority of people do not want to face. To face it might mean that they would have to give up their amusements and distractions, and certainly they are not willing to do that. So they send their children off to schools where the teacher cares no more for them than they do. Why should he care? Teaching is merely a job to him, a way of earning money. ...

We say so easily that we love our children; but is there love in our hearts when we accept the existing social conditions, when we do not want to bring about a fundamental transformation in this destructive society? And as long as we look to the specialists to educate our children, this confusion and misery will continue; for the specialists, being concerned with the part and not with the whole, are themselves unintegrated.

Instead of being the most honoured and responsible occupation, education is now considered slightingly, and most educators are fixed in a routine. They are not really concerned with integration and intelligence, but with the imparting of information; and a man who merely imparts information with the world crashing about him is not an educator. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, pp. 94-96]

29 I have spent thirty years as a scholar examining the nature of democracy, and even more as a citizen optimistically celebrating its possibilities, but today I am increasingly persuaded that the reason for the country's inaction is that Americans do not really care about education—the country has grown comfortable with the game of "let's pretend we care." ...

How sanctimonious all the hand wringing over still another "education crisis" seems. Are we ourselves really so literate? Are our kids stupid or smart for ignoring what we preach and copying what we practice? The young, with their keen noses for hypocrisy, are in fact adept readers—but not of books. They are society-smart rather than school-smart, and what they read so acutely are the social signals emanating from the world in which they will have to make a living. Their teachers in that world, the nation's true pedagogues, are television, advertising, movies, politics, and the celebrity domains they define. ...

> The very first lesson smart kids learn is that it is much more important to heed what society teaches implicitly by its deeds and reward structures than what school teaches explicitly in its lesson plans and civic sermons. ...
>
> We honor ambition, we reward greed, we celebrate materialism, we worship acquisitiveness, we cherish success, and we commercialize the classroom—and then we bark at the young about the gentle arts of the spirit. ...
>
> Schools can and should lead, but when they confront a society that in every instance tells a story exactly opposite to the one they are supposed to be teaching, their job becomes impossible. When the society undoes each workday what the school tries to do each school day, schooling can't make much of a difference. [Benjamin R. Barber, "America Skips School," 1993, *The Anteater Reader*, 8th ed., edited by Ray Zimmerman & Carla Copenhaven, Pearson Custom, 2005, pp. 335-338]

30 > The delicate fabric of the civilization into which the successive generations are woven has unraveled, and children are raised, not educated.
>
> I am speaking here not of the unhappy, broken homes that are such a prominent part of American life, but the relatively happy ones, where husband and wife like each other and care about their children, very often unselfishly devoting the best parts of their lives to them. But they have nothing to give their children in the way of a vision of the world, of high models of action or profound sense of connection with others. ... People sup together, play together, travel together, but they do not think together. Hardly any homes have any intellectual life whatsoever, let alone one that informs the vital interests of life. Educational TV marks the high tide for family intellectual life. ...
>
> [F]athers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise—as priests, prophets or philosophers are wise. Specialized competence and success are all that they can imagine. [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon and Schuster, 1987, pp. 57-58]

Related:
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?

17. What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?

1 Much of education occurs implicitly rather than explicitly. One can certainly mount specific courses in how to think, how to act, how to behave morally. Some didactic lessons are appropriate. Yet we humans are the kinds of animals who learn chiefly by observing others—what they value, what they spurn, how they conduct themselves from day to day, and, especially, what they do when they believe that no one is looking. [Howard Gardener, *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*, 1999, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2021, p. 23]

2 A lot of what I learned was not necessarily directly through the classroom. A lot of it was in conversations with older boys, ... [and] from the [teachers] outside of school hours. ...

I think it's a thing about learning and education in general, that you model yourself on *somebody*. You see somebody, and you think: "This is interesting. This is good. I'd like to be more like this." And so you feel your way into what it's like to be that person, and take on some of their thinking. [Ian McGilchrist, "The Education of Iain McGilchrist, Part I: From Winchester College to All Souls," *YouTube*, uploaded by Ralston College, 9 Dec. 2024, 32:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-GebJNsI20]

3 What we are in ourselves is much more important than the additional question of what to teach the child ... [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, p. 46]

4 Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 1841, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965, p. 247]

5 What the teacher "teaches" is by no means chiefly in the words he speaks. It is at least in part in what he *is*, in what he *does*, in what he seems to *wish to be*. The secret curriculum is the teacher's own lived values and convictions, in the lineaments of his expression and

in the biography of passion or self-exile which is written in his eyes. [Jonathan Kozol, *The Night is Dark and I Am Far From Home*, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, p. 101-102]

6 [T]he educational function does not rest upon our ability to control, or our will to instruct, but upon our human nature and the nature of experience. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, p. 246]

7 An honest relationship imparts the standard of truth more clearly than any disciplinary encounter. An empathic relationship demonstrates the value of empathy more powerfully than any lesson or induction. ...

The moral quality of the parent/child relationship overrides all other communications that the parent might attempt. This is one place in which the medium really is the message ... When the quality of the relationship is in line with the parent's message, the message becomes convincing to the child. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 187-188]

8 The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got. ...

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of the confusion. I mean the cry, "Save the children." ... Now I am concerned, first and last, to maintain that unless you can save the fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save others, for we cannot save ourselves. We cannot teach citizenship if we are not citizens; we cannot free others if we have forgotten the appetite of freedom. Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand? Thus we find that education is of all the cases the clearest for our general purpose. It is vain to save children; for they cannot remain children. By hypothesis we are teaching them to be men; and how can it be so simple to teach an ideal manhood to others if it is so vain and hopeless to find one for ourselves? [Gilbert K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 1910, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927, pp. 247-251, https://archive.org/details/whatswrongwithwo00ches/mode/2up]

9 Maybe all of us will learn to grapple with the paradox that living our lives more fully is not narcissism, but service to the world when we bring a more fully achieved gift to the collective. We do not serve our children, our friends and partners, our society by living partial lives, and being secretly depressed and resentful. We serve the world by finding what feeds us, and, having been fed, then share our gift with others. ...

Jung said that "the greatest burden the child must bear is the unlived life of the parent." [James Hollis, *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*, Gotham / Penguin, 2009, pp. 40, 138]

10 [W]e are incapable of loving another unless we love ourselves, just as we are incapable of teaching our children self-discipline unless we ourselves are self-disciplined. It is actually impossible to forsake our own spiritual development in favor of someone else's. We cannot forsake self-discipline and at the same time be disciplined in our care for another. We cannot be a source of strength unless we nurture our own strength. As we proceed in our exploration of the nature of love, I believe it will become clear that not only do self-love and love of others go hand in hand but that ultimately they are indistinguishable. [M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology Of Love, Traditional Values And Spiritual Growth*, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1978, pp. 82-83]

11 You must help a child become a virtuous, responsible, awake being, capable of full reciprocity—able to take care of himself and others, and to thrive while doing so. Why would you think it acceptable to do anything less for yourself? [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, pp. 62-63]

12 Our first duty as social physicians is to heal ourselves, and to heal others only out of the superabundance of our own health. For if we are healthy as a people and another people is ill, and if this people believes in our power of healing, then our innocent health will itself be a healing power. ... Health is infectious. [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, p. 12, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

13 Dr. Joseph Jankowski, Chief of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, sees extremely troubled children from some of the most affluent communities in this country ... [He] notes, "These parents certainly want the best for

their children. But they want it in a mechanistic way. They want buttons pushed, and pushed quickly, so that their kids get better with little effort. But helping troubled kids takes a long time and what these kids really need are their parents *themselves*." [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 31-32]

14 As an aside to parents, teachers, psychotherapists, and managers who may [want] to gain insight on how to support the self-esteem of others, I want to say that the best place to begin is still with oneself. If one does not understand how the dynamics of self-esteem work internally—if one does not know by direct experience what lowers or raises one's own self-esteem—one will not have that intimate understanding of the subject necessary to make an optimal contribution to others. Also, the unresolved issues within oneself set the limits of one's effectiveness in helping others. It may be tempting, but it is self-deceiving to believe that what one says can communicate more powerfully than what one manifests in one's person. We must become what we wish to teach. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, p. 63]

15 How can we have happy homes with love in them when the home is a tiny corner of a homeland that shows hate socially in a hundred ways? You can see why I cannot look upon education as a matter of exams and classes and learning. The school evades the basic issue—all the science and maths and history in the world will not help make the home more loving, the child free from inhibitions, the parents free from neurosis. [A. S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, 1960, St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 250]

16 Every family is a naturally and unselfconsciously religious place because every family is a place where day after day, year after year, a coherent and often undeviating disposition toward ultimate reality is being expressed. The beliefs, rules, values, ideals, prejudices, passions, promises, betrayals, terrors, demons, and angels that every family passes before and onto its children declare, finally, where we who belong to this family stand in relation to the awesome powers of the universe. How generous or unforgiving, gentle or terrible, just or capricious is the Life Force? What is required of us to be in good faith with our Maker? How dangerous or how exhilarating is it to be alive? [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, p. 267]

17 Mere technical training inevitably makes for ruthlessness, and to educate our children we must be sensitive to the whole movement of life. What we think, what we do, what we say matters infinitely, because it creates the environment, and the environment either helps or hinders the child.

Obviously, then, those of us who are deeply interested in this problem will have to begin to understand ourselves and thereby help to transform society; we will make it our direct responsibility to bring about a new approach to education. ... The way out of this problem lies through ourselves. We must begin to understand our relationship with our fellow men, with nature, with ideas and with things, for without that understanding there is no hope, there is no way out of conflict and suffering. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, pp. 48-49]

18 By segregating children by age, by caging them in so they can't avoid those who harass them, by indoctrinating them in a setting where competition and winning—being better than others—are the highest values, and by denying them any meaningful voice in school governance, we establish the breeding grounds for bullying. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 79]

19 When children are herded together in great numbers and are treated as ciphers in some huge, indifferent sum, the anxiety of anonymity absolutely forces them into protective alliances. They reach out for some identity to fill the void of self, however inadequate and fantasy-ridden that identity may be. Yet the power they achieve by banding together —though it may be crippling to growth—is not illusory; it is real.

What I have just said is really the whole of what we learned about racism at our school. The very young wouldn't have it. The older ones were stuck with it, but some few worked through. We teachers never preached tolerance, desegregation, integration, or anything else. Our small, face-to-face community diminished anxiety, eliminated fantasy and estrangement, and supported ego growth; and step by step, at least in school, racism fell away. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, p. 12]

20 Teachers ask me all the time how they can teach people to be moral—or "human," or "humane." But we can't *teach* it, can't *make* someone moral or humane, and least of all

in a place where, without his consent, we have taken control of his life and thought. The most we can do to help someone else become more moral is to treat him morally, which at the very least means that we do not make him our subject or slave. ...

We use moral judgment only when we make choices, serious choices, choices that lead to action—and no student can do that in S-chool, where all the serious choices and decisions are made for him by others. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 185-187]

21 I believe that much of the present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparations. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative.

[M]oral education centers upon this conception of the school as a mode of social life, that the best and deepest moral training is precisely that which one gets through having to enter into proper relations with others in a unity of work and thought. The present educational systems, so far as they destroy or neglect this unity, render it difficult or impossible to get any genuine, regular moral training. [John Dewey, "My Pedagogical Creed," 1897, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 431]

22 The essence of education, I suggest, is the transmission of values, but values do not help us to pick our way through life unless they have become our own, a part, so to say, of our mental make-up. This means that they are more than mere formulae or dogmatic assertions: that we think and feel with them, that they are the very instruments through which we look at, interpret, and experience the world. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, pp. 86-87]

23 For good or for ill, our instant mass communications transmit the dominant values of our society relentlessly. A noxious or degenerate cultural environment will undermine a parent's influence, whereas a wholesome and vibrant cultural climate will bolster

parental guidance. A society rich with elevated beliefs and practices encourages young people to pursue worthy aspirations and expand their sense of what they can accomplish for themselves and the world. Societies where cynicism prevails tend to demoralize young people, diminish their aspirations, and threaten their prospects for a purposeful life. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 162]

24 Students are not literally free when they have been freed from their teachers. They then simply come under the control of other conditions, and we must look at those conditions and their effects if we are to improve teaching. [B.F. Skinner, "The Free and Happy Student," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 55(1), 1973, pp. 13-16, https://education-consumers.org/free-happy-student-article/]

25 Fundamentally, there is no right education except growing up into a worthwhile world. Indeed, our excessive concern with problems of education at present simply means that the grown-ups do not have such a world. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 59]

26 [A] culture of purpose must be built—and continually rebuilt—in multiple small ways, by both individuals and institutions, that take responsibility for the values they present through their words, their deeds, and the examples they set. Government, especially at the local level, certainly can play a constructive role by participating with these individuals and institutions; but it cannot foster youth purpose through top-down programs or coercive legislation. A culture of purpose cannot be enforced. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 163]

27 The closest thing to a prerequisite for a culture of purpose is a sense of community. When parents, teachers, and other adults in children's lives share a sense of community, they reinforce each other's efforts. ...

I have seen this in ... town meetings dedicated to creating the most conducive climate for raising the young. ... places where adults present [young people] with high expectations that are clear and coherent. ... discussions about how to marshal the town's resources in

order to promote healthy youth development. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 164]

28 Here as elsewhere, our problem is lapse of community. Our society has less and less community between its adults and its youth. Traditional and family crafts and trades no longer exist, and a youth has few chances to form himself on model workmen in his neighborhood and learn the ropes and opportunities. The difficulties of getting into a union seem, and often are, insuperable. ...

These remarks are not optimistic toward solving the problems of employment, and unemployment, of youth. By and large, I think these problems are insoluble, and *should* be insoluble, until our affluent society becomes worthier to work in, more honorable in its functions, and more careful of its human resources. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 111-112]

29 Man himself may be controlled by his environment, but it is an environment which is almost wholly of his own making. The physical environment of most people is largely man-made. The surfaces a person walks on, the walls which shelter him, the clothing he wears, many of the foods he eats, the tools he uses, the vehicles he moves about in, most of the things he listens to and looks at are human products. The social environment is obviously man-made—it generates the language a person speaks, the customs he follows, and the behavior he exhibits with respect to the ethical, religious, governmental, economic, educational, and psychotherapeutic institutions which control him. The evolution of a culture is in fact a kind of gigantic exercise in self-control. As the individual controls himself by manipulating the world in which he lives, so the human species has constructed an environment in which its members behave in a highly effective way. Mistakes have been made, and we have no assurance that the environment man has constructed will continue to provide gains which outstrip the losses, but man as we know him, for better or worse, is what man has made of man. [B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, Bantam, 1971, pp. 196-197]

30 All human environments have some idea, some belief worked up in them, responsibly and self-consciously or not. Some people set out with specific ideas to create particular environments. But it works the other way as well: We can look at a space and deduce

ideas and beliefs *from it*. The space is a visible container of human action: at times oppressive or liberating; beautiful or ugly.

The most taken-for-granted, sanctified, commonsense, and commonplace features of life in school, for example, carry messages about important issues: this is how people learn; this is how people think; this is the nature of knowledge; this is what is valuable; this is what you should attend to. And these messages constitute a major part of what is learned and what becomes assumed about school. ... The more aware we are of our thoughts and goals, the more responsible we are for our values and beliefs, the more intentional we can be in creating spaces that speak and work for us. [William Ayers, *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*, Teacher's College, 1993, pp. 51-52]

31 The moral regeneration of mankind can be accomplished only by moral education, and until moral education is given priority over all other forms of education, I see no hope for the world. I have already indicated what I mean by moral education—*not* education by moral precept, but education by moral practice, which in effect means education by aesthetic discipline ...

The whole burden of Plato's theory of education is to the effect that if only we bring up children in the contemplation of universal forms, in the practice of graceful and harmonious movements, in the active making of beautiful objects, then these children will instinctively recognize and choose goodness when they see it. Aesthetic education develops ethical virtue. [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, pp. 38, 74, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

32 [O]ur function ... as teachers and exemplars in general, is, as Plato said in one of his most visionary flights:

"To be guided by our instinct for whatever is lovely and gracious, so that our young men, dwelling in a wholesome climate, may drink in good from every quarter, whence, like a breeze bearing health from happy regions, some influence from noble works constantly falls upon eye and ear from childhood upward, and imperceptibly draws them into sympathy and harmony with the beauty of reason, whose impress they take." [*The Republic*, translated by F. S. Cornford, Oxford UP] [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, p. 129, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

33 Complete isolation is impossible in nature. The young live in some environment whether we intend it or not, and this environment is constantly interacting with what children and young bring to it, and the result is the shaping of their interests, minds and character—either educatively or mis-educatively. If the professed educator abdicates his responsibility for judging and selecting the kind of environment that his best understanding leads him to think will be conducive to growth, then the young are left at the mercy of all the unorganized and casual forces of the modern social environment that inevitably play upon them as long as they live. [John Dewey, "The Need for a Philosophy of Education," 1934, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 9]

Related:
– Do we really value education? Why do we value it?
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?
– What is the nature of authority? How is it gained or lost?

18. Why might young people dislike school?

1 [C]hildren who generally fear and dislike S-chool, but cannot escape it, may be more able to cope with it if (1) they are not made to feel that they are bad *because* they don't like S-chool, and (2) they feel that their parents understand and agree with their reasons for not liking S-chool. It would help at least some unhappy children if their parents would say to them, "I understand how you feel about that place, and I agree with you. I would feel the same way if I had to go there myself, and I would get you out of there if I could. But I can't, so the best thing for us to do is put our heads together and see how we can make the best of it." The child would be stronger for feeling he had an ally. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 213]

2 Let us cease looking upon the people's resistance to our education as upon a hostile element of pedagogics, but, on the contrary, let us see in it an expression of the people's will which alone ought to guide our activities. ... [F]or the educating class to know what is good and what bad, the classes which receive the education must have the full power to express their dissatisfaction, or, at least, to swerve from the education which instinctively does not satisfy them,—that the criterion of pedagogics is only liberty. [Leo Tolstoy, "On Popular Education," 1862, *Tolstoy On Education*, translated by Leo Wiener, Phoenix / U of Chicago P, 1967, pp. 28-30]

3 [O]ne of [Paul] Goodman's most important points is that the deviant child who is not "playing the game of schooling" is making a non-verbal or behavioural request for an alternative learning environment. And Goodman never tired of pointing out that the educational system in the United States was inadequate partly because it viewed education in an extremely narrow sense. [Ronald Swartz, "A Dialogue on Education for Autonomy: An Interview with Ronald Swartz and Thomas Szasz," *Interchange*, Vol. 20 No. 4, 1989, pp. 32-47, https://www.scribd.com/document/208577575/A-Dialogue-on-Education-for-Autonomy-An-Interview-with-Thomas-Szasz]

4 "Only a few children in school ever become good at learning in the way we try to make them learn. Most of them get humiliated, frightened, and discouraged." [John Holt, *How Children Learn*, 1967] And in this lies the problem with this particular artificial

system: When children struggle with it, "school" pushes us, with overwhelming force, toward fixing the child—figuring our what's wrong with that little psyche that's causing them to feel humiliation, fright, discouragement, boredom, disengagement—rather than questioning the system. [Susan Wise Bauer, *Rethinking School: How to Take Charge of Your Child's Education*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2018, pp. 6-7]

5 [W]ise people are able to balance three responses to situations: adaptation (changing the self to fit the environment), shaping (changing the environment), and selection (choosing to move to a new environment). [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 152-153]

6 Our schools, as currently structured, are designed for one type of person: the conforming test taker. ... Yet [some students] don't care about tests and don't enjoy sitting at a desk. They may become school failures or indifferent students, not because of lack of intelligence or sensitivity but because of the nature of their intelligence and sensitivities. They are resisters who protect that part of themselves that they want to develop in the future; they will not conform and risk losing their own unique strengths in the process. As a consequence, they become problems at home as well as at school because most parents buy the notion that school success is a sign of intelligence and that school failure is a sign of pathology. Too many parents also accept the propaganda that school success is somehow related to success in future life and, often with the best intentions, make themselves and their children neurotic over grades. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, pp. 44-45]

7 [S]chools typically give low status to so-called nonacademic work, including the visual and performing arts, physical education, and practical and "vocational" programs. The result is that very many students, even those who are good at academic work, never discover the real range of their aptitudes, especially if they lie in these other, neglected areas. ...

[B]ecause they have such a narrow view of ability, school systems usually promote a very wide idea of disability. ... These days, anyone whose real strengths lie outside the restricted field of academic work can find being at school a dispiriting experience and emerge from it wondering if they have any significant aptitudes at all. [Ken Robinson,

Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 63-65]

8 To many children, school represents a "second chance"—an opportunity to acquire a better sense of self and a better vision of life than was offered in their home. ...

But for some children, school is a legally enforced incarceration at the hands of teachers who lack either the self-esteem or the training or both to do their jobs properly. These are teachers who do not inspire but humiliate. They do not speak the language of courtesy and respect but of ridicule and sarcasm. With invidious comparisons they flatter one student at the expense of another. With unmanaged impatience they deepen a child's terror of making mistakes. They have no other notion of discipline than threats of pain. They do not motivate by offering values but by evoking fear. They do not believe in a child's possibilities; they believe only in limitations. They do not light fires in minds, they extinguish them. Who cannot recall encountering at least one such teacher during one's school years? [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 202-203]

9 [T]he greatest mental health need in the school is informed and mentally healthy adults ... [S]ometimes the sanest element in the school are the children, who fight to keep from drowning as the ocean of adult disorientation beats upon them. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, p. 25]

10 In today's schools, it is rare to find teachers who hold high academic and moral standards for their students. Instead, too many of today's teachers work with an air of professional detachment from their students, allowing students to just get by with minimal contributions and efforts. ... In effect, the teachers tells the student: If you show enough "learning" so as not to embarrass either of us, I will let you pass through this course with the credentials that you need to complete your requirements. Mediocrity becomes the norm—even a dreary goal of sorts—for both teacher and student. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 196-197]

11 Children don't like school because to them school is—dare I say it—prison. Children don't like school because, like all human beings, they crave freedom, and in school they are not free. ...

Everyone who has ever been to school knows that school is prison, but almost nobody beyond school age says it. It's not polite. We all tiptoe around this truth because admitting it would make us seem cruel and would point a finger at well-intentioned people doing what they believe to be essential. How could all these nice people be sending their children to prison or working for an institution that imprisons children? How could our democratic government, which is founded on principles of freedom and self-determination, make laws requiring children and adolescents to spend a good portion of their days in prison? [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 67]

12 [M]uch of what is disturbing about students' attitudes and behavior may be a function of the fact that they have little to say about what happens to them all day. They are compelled to follow someone else's rules, study someone else's curriculum, and submit continually to someone else's evaluation. The mystery, really, is not that so many students are indifferent about what they have to do in school but that any of them are not. [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

13 At present, in most states, for 10 to 13 years every young person is obliged to sit the better part of his day in a room almost always too crowded, facing front, doing lessons predetermined by a distant administration at the state capital and that have no relation to his own intellectual, social, or animal interests, and not much relation even to his economic interests. The overcrowding precludes individuality or spontaneity, reduces the young to ciphers, and the teacher to a martinet. If a youth tries to follow his own bent, he is interrupted and even jailed. If he does not perform, he is humiliated and threatened, but he is *not allowed to fail and get out*. Middle class youth go through this for at least four more years—at the college level, the overcrowding has become an academic scandal—but they are steeled to it and supported by their middle-class anxiety and middle-class perquisites, including money to spend. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 56]

14 Children do not like being incompetent any more than they like being ignorant. They want to learn how to do, and do well, the things they see being done by bigger people around them. This is why they soon find school such a disappointment; they so seldom get a chance to learn anything important or do anything real. [John Holt, *Escape From Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*, 1974, HoltGWS, 2013, p. 73]

15 Whatever significance schooling might once have held for the majority of youngsters in our society, it no longer holds significance for many of them. Most students (and, for that matter, many parents and teachers) cannot provide compelling reasons for attending school. ... The real world appears elsewhere: in the media, in the marketplace, and all too frequently in the demimonde of drugs, violence, and crime. Much if not most of what happens in schools happens because that is the way it was done in earlier generations, not because we have a convincing rationale for maintaining it today. The often-heard statement that school is basically custodial rather than educational harbors more than a grain of truth. [Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Basic Books, 1991, pp. 200-202]

16 Society is not willing to let adolescents run loose and parents are not willing to tend them at home. Therefore they must go to school. Almost all teachers, from kindergarten to graduate school, are to a greater or lesser degree being paid to keep students in a room or busy with homework who don't want to be there. ... The schools that most middle-class students attend are not really cruel or oppressive; teachers sincerely ask for thinking, problem-solving, doubting, rationality, critical thinking, and genuine discussion among students. Nothing makes the teacher's life easier than truly to interest students in these activities. But all these activities, and rationality itself, are tainted because deep down so many teachers are also using them instrumentally in order to kill time and babysit. [Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*, Oxford UP, 1986, pp. 91-92]

17 For too many of our children, school activities seem devoid of meaning and isolated from the rest of their lives. ... [T]he academic agenda of schooling—the subject matter, the problem solving, the famed "three Rs"—is all taken as beside the point, useless, something that one does out of drab necessity. Their performance is perfunctory, a cheerless going-through-the-motions.

It is a principle of human development that, over time, one becomes what one does. ...

A child who spends her precious years of school life in ritualistic, barren exercises learns a pattern of vacuous response that can diminish the child's future efforts and future aspirations. Going through the motions of learning out of dreary obligation is not a benign experience for a child. It is a deadening one. It can lead to an intransigent sense of disinterest in learning and achievement. ...

[T]hese children are acquiring habits ... of idleness, of getting by with the least possible effort, of cynicism about the very possibility of achievement. They are habits of shirking, of ineptitude, of willed incompetence. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 34-35]

18 Most young people find school hard to use. Indeed, many young people find school a negative learning environment. Not only do schools fail to help students become competent in important life skills, they provide a warped image of learning as something that takes place only in schools, segregated from the real world, organized by disciplines and school bells, and assessed by multiple-choice, paper-and-pencil tests. Schools have scores of written and unwritten rules that stifle young people's innate drive for learning and restrict their choices about at what they want to excel, when to practice, from whom to learn, and how to learn. It is no wonder that so many creative and entrepreneurial youth disengage from productive learning. They recognize that staying in the schools we offer them constitutes dropping out from the real world. [Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski, *Leaving to Learn*, quoted by Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, p. 149]

19 [Schools] are teaching [our kids] that learning is to be equated with tedium, senseless tasks, arbitrary directives, a mindless competition for favor, and the stifling of curiosity. The public school system is an authoritarian, procrustean bureaucracy to which every child is expected to adjust himself. Ignoring the uniqueness of each individual, it expects all children of a given age to learn the same things at the same time in the same way. If a child does not meet expectations, the system assumes there is something wrong with *him*, not the school. Naturally, most students, if not humiliated and terrified, are bored. [Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 81]

20 The high school is an ungracious institution. ... This is its peculiar lack and the source of its treachery to adolescents. It cannot be counted on for generosity, for imagination, or for style. Its staff has on the whole too little confidence in its own dignity or judgment, and too little respect for that of others. It seldom understands how these are derived from personal experience and expressed in individual action. It is composed chiefly of individuals who have achieved their own basis of security by cautious attention to external norms—and these not the most generous. It does not ask of a student whether in a particular action he is being true to himself and his own nature, but whether he is doing what the school ought to expect. If he isn't, it tries to be fair—it wants very much to be fair. But it is usually too frightened. ...

A school that restricts freedom, invades privacy, and limits enterprise in order to promote normality is certainly not going to promote growth. Yet the average teacher or school administrator could hardly be expected to see personality development as a process of individuation; the whole process by which he himself has been selected mitigates against it. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 125-126]

21 In the name of education, we have increasingly deprived children of the time and freedom they need to educate themselves through their own means. And in the name of safety, we have deprived children of the freedom they need to develop the understanding, courage, and confidence required to face life's dangers and challenges with equanimity. ... We have created a world in which children must suppress their natural instincts to take charge of their own education and, instead, mindlessly follow paths to nowhere laid out for them by adults. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, pp. 19-20]

22 One of the tragedies of our system of schooling is that it teaches students that life is a series of hoops that one must get through, by one means or another, and that success lies in others' judgments rather than in real, self-satisfying accomplishments. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 75]

23 Every instruction ought to be only an answer to the questions put by life, whereas school not only does not call forth questions, but does not even answer those that are called forth by life. [Leo Tolstoy, "On Popular Education," 1862, *Tolstoy On Education*, translated by Leo Wiener, Phoenix / U of Chicago P, 1967, p. 15]

24 Even in the best schools a close examination of curriculum and its sequences turns up a lack of coherence ... The logic of the school-mind is that it is better to leave school with a tool kit of superficial jargon derived from economics, sociology, natural science and so on than to leave with one genuine enthusiasm. But quality in education entails learning about something in depth. Confusion is thrust upon kids by too many strange adults, each working alone with only the thinnest relationship with each other ... [John Gatto, "The Seven-Lesson School Teacher," 1991, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, pp. 1-4]

25 Students recognize that it would be impossible to delve deeply into their school subjects, even if they wanted to. Time does not permit it. They must follow the schedule set by the school. [Peter Gray, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*, Basic Books, 2013, p. 80]

26 [Less than 4 percent of students in middle and high school] report a learning environment that regularly lets them: develop their own ideas; learn something they are interested in; choose how to do their work; have a say about what happens to them. [Winthrop, Shoukry, and Nitkin, *The Disengagement Gap*, 2025]

Excellent teachers strive to provide these opportunities, but they are often held back by the traditional school system, which is designed to transmit knowledge and to sort and rank. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 18-19]

27 There are no private spaces for children, there is no private time. Class change lasts three hundred seconds to keep promiscuous fraternization at low levels. Students are encouraged to tattle on each other or even to tattle on their own parents. ...

I assign a type of extended schooling called "homework," so that the effect of surveillance, if not the surveillance itself, travels into private households, where students might otherwise use free time to learn something unauthorized from a father or mother, by exploration or by apprenticing to some wise person in the neighborhood. [John Gatto, "The Seven-Lesson School Teacher," 1991, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, p. 10]

28 [S]chools are already a major cause of weak families and weak communities. They separate parents and children from vital interaction with each other and from true curiosity about each other's lives. Schools stifle family originality by appropriating the critical time needed for any sound idea of family to develop—then they blame the family for its failure to be a family. It's like a malicious person lifting a photograph from the developing chemicals too early, and then pronouncing the photographer incompetent. [John Gatto, "We Need Less School, Not More," 1992, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, p. 67]

29 Schools seem to me among the most anti-democratic, most authoritarian, most destructive, and most dangerous institutions of modern society. No other institution does more harm or more lasting harm to more people or destroys so much of their curiosity, independence, trust, dignity, and sense of identity and worth. ...

Schools do not protect children from the badness of the world outside. They are at least as bad as the world outside, and the harm they do to the children in their power creates much of the badness of the world outside. The sickness of the modern world is in many ways a school-induced sickness. It is in school that most people learn to expect and accept that some expert can always place them in some sort of rank or hierarchy. It is in school that we meet, become used to, and learn to believe in the totally controlled society. We do not learn much science, but we learn to worship "scientists" and to believe that anything we might conceivably need or want can only come, and someday will come, from them. The school is the closest we have yet been able to come to Huxley's *Brave New World*, with its alphas and betas, deltas and epsilons—and now it even has its soma. Everyone, including children, should have the right to say "No!" to it. [John Holt, *Escape From Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*, 1974, HoltGWS, 2013, pp. 167-168]

30 [T]oo often when kids are resisting, adults see them as problem children rather than children with problems.

Resistance is your kids' way of using what power they have to let you know things are *not* working. Since they are young, it often comes out in ways that seem strange to adults. Rarely do students give parents, teachers, or coaches a self-reflective soliloquy on the reasons they are resisting, their feelings and struggles. Instead, what you see is a pain-in-the-ass kid. For kids themselves, it is a cry for help. Instead of labeling children, parents need to listen.

Kids in resister mode are desperately using what is under their control to make their voices heard. And they often are resisting for good reasons. ...

Adults in families, school, and communities can help kids build agency and point in a better direction. Every time a parent or teacher or coach sees a kid resisting and tries to understand what is driving their behavior before doling out consequences, they are helping children develop the self-reflection skills that are part of having agency. ... When adults help young people not only self-reflect but also think critically about what they need and help them build strategies to move forward, they are helping them build agency. Ultimately, this agency empowers adolescents to leverage the resources and assistance they need to overcome barriers and pursue goals they have identified as important. [Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better*, Crown / Penguin Random House, 2025, pp. 88-90]

Related:
– What are the effects of coercion in education?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?
– What is "reality of encounter" and why is it important in education?
– How does our experience of school resources differ from those outside of school?

19. Why might teachers dislike school?

1 I teach in the hope of making the world a better place.

While practically every teacher I have known over many years came to teaching in part with this hope, only a few outstanding teachers are able to carry it fully into a life in teaching. What happens? To begin with, most of us attend colleges or preparation programs that neither acknowledge nor honor our larger and deeper purposes—places that turn our attention to research on teaching or methods of teaching and away from a serious encounter with the reality of teaching, the art and the craft of teaching, the morality of teaching, or the ecology of childhood. Our love of children, our idealism, is made to seem quaint in these places. Later, we find ourselves struggling to survive in schools structured in ways that make our purposes seem hopeless and inaccessible. We may have longed for child-centered communities of shared values and common goals, but mostly we settle for institutions, procedure-centered places characterized by hierarchy, control, and efficiency. [William Ayers, *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*, Teacher's College, 1993, pp. 8-9]

2 I went into teaching wanting to do it differently, to be the kind of teacher who leads by example, not by coercion. But once I get into the daily grind of the work that I do, surrounded by people who insist that I support the status quo—administrators, other teachers, parents, students—I start to slide. I start to forget why I'm there and what I'm trying to do. Instead my goal becomes to get through the day without getting criticized. I get worn down. And I start to hate my job because I'm constantly trying to use power I don't believe in to enforce policies I don't believe in. And I'm feeling so pressured and stressed and busy that I don't even realize that is what's going on, until it gets so bad that it forces me to stop and spend time reevaluating. Then I recommit to working for change, but the second I get back in that environment, the slow erosion begins again. [an acquaintance of the author, quoted by Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, p. 78]

3 Over and over, teachers have told us that they began their careers with excitement and enthusiasm, eager to work with the students to facilitate their intellectual and personal development. But as the years passed and the pressures and demands intensified, the teachers have said, they lost much of their enthusiasm. They point to standardized

curricula, where they have to teach specified material rather than what seemed right to them, and to the pressures on them to be sure their students get high standardized achievement scores. ...

In a way, it is all quite ironic. Parents, politicians, and school administrators all want students to be creative problem-solvers and to learn material at a deep, conceptual level. But in their eagerness to achieve these ends, they pressure teachers to produce. The paradox is that the more they do that, the more controlling the teachers become, which, as we have seen so many times, undermines intrinsic motivation, creativity, and conceptual understanding in the students. The harder the teachers are pushed to get results, the less likely it is that the important results will be forthcoming. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 157-158]

4 [T]he [teaching] job is carried on under impossible conditions of overcrowding and saving public money. *Not* that there is not enough social wealth, but first things are not put first. Also, the school system has spurious aims. It soon becomes clear that the underlying aims are to relieve the home and keep the kids quiet; or, suddenly, the aim is to produce physicists. Timid supervisors, bigoted clerics, and ignorant school boards forbid real teaching. ... A commercially debauched popular culture makes learning disesteemed. ... Progressive methods are emasculated. Attention to each case is out of the question, and all the children—the bright, the average, and the dull—are systematically retarded one way or another, while the teacher's hands are tied. Naturally the pay is low—for the work is hard, useful, and of public concern, all three of which qualities tend to bring lower pay. It is alleged that the low pay is why there is a shortage of teachers and why the best do not choose the profession. My guess is that the best avoid it because of the certainty of miseducating. Nor are the best *wanted* by the system, for they are not safe. [Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, Vintage, 1960, pp. 24-25]

5 [S]chools in the United States are subjected to many powerful pressures, from such bodies as teachers' and administrators' unions, school boards, state legislatures, and the voting public. ... These combined pressures make it very difficult for individual teachers to operate with much autonomy or sense of empowerment. Perhaps as a reaction to the fact that external agencies often attempt to institute far-reaching reforms "from the top," schools—like other bureaucratic institutions—have developed strong protective

mechanisms that often preclude any meaningful kind of reform or strangle it before it has a chance to take hold. ...

Even though educational systems may pay lip service to goals like "understanding" or "deep knowledge," they in fact prove inimical to the pursuit of these goals. Sometimes these goals are considered to be hopelessly idealistic or unrealistic; at most, in the view of educational bureaucrats, schools ought to produce citizens who exhibit some basic literacies and can hold a job. But even in cases where these goals are taken seriously, events conspire to undermine their pursuit. Particularly when systems are expected to produce hard evidence of their success, the focus sooner or later comes to fall on indices that are readily quantified, such as scores on objective tests. Measuring of understanding must be postponed for another day or restricted to a few experimental schools, which are allowed to operate under waivers. [Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Basic Books, 1991, p. 139-140]

6 [T]eachers are often encouraged—at least at the rhetorical level—to take the initiative and to be forceful and imaginative in their teaching. In fact, however, they feel caught in a bind, for adhering to the regulations is so time-consuming and exhausting that little time or energy remains for innovation. Risking censure or worse, a few teachers will ignore the regulations in order to pursue a more individualized program of instruction. Most teachers, however, will achieve an uneasy truce, with both their superiors and their students, by adopting "defensive teaching." Adhering to the rules, not making excessive demands on anyone (including themselves), asking students mostly to memorize definitions and lists rather than to tackle challenging problems, they will maintain control over their classrooms, but at the cost of educational inspiration. [Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, Basic Books, 1991, pp. 140-141]

7 Teachers are trapped in the system, ... as one of them told me. A veteran of many years, she has watched her institution evolve in the direction of a customer-service mentality: give the parents what they want, no matter what's good for the kids. Don't challenge them intellectually, don't encourage them to engage the material, don't even try to insist on academic rigor.

That may be the most damning thing about these schools, so full of smart teachers teaching the smart children of smart parents: that they finally don't care about learning

at all. "Don't put any ideas into his head": a request that is honored all too well. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, p. 49]

8 Every teacher who is told what material to cover, when to cover it, and how to evaluate children's performance is a teacher who knows that enthusiasm for one's work quickly evaporates in the face of being controlled. Not every teacher, however, realizes that exactly the same thing holds true for students: deprive them of self-determination and you have likely deprived them of motivation. [Alfie Kohn, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1993, https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/choices-children/]

9 A teacher's guide provides instructions for the teacher as to certain methods guaranteed to help us lead our students to a set of seemingly inevitable conclusions ...

Unfortunately, while seeming to make the teacher's job more simple, the teacher's guides are also taking away the satisfaction of all independent and creative labor in the preparation of the daily work. The guidebook seems to be the teacher's friend. Insidiously, it also robs the teacher of the only intellectual dignity which our profession still allows us: the individual, passionate or whimsical exhilaration of *invention*. [John Kozol, *On Being a Teacher*, 1981, Oneworld, 2009, p. 49]

10 Part of the tragedy is that teachers themselves were recruited to produce—under careful guidance—the objectives, materials, and tests for the programs that were to undermine their professional skills and authority. The boredom and frustration to which students were then subject carried the reassuring label "produced by teachers." All of this still goes on today, with teachers recruited to write "standards" for themselves to attain, as if teachers never had any standards before ...

The author of a highly successful commercial instructional program that employed all of these fragmented techniques told me why they had to be so detailed and specific —"You can't trust teachers to teach." His program was so detailed it even told teachers when to smile, and to ignore student questions if the program hadn't provided answers.

And that is the belief that has lead to the proliferation of experts claiming that teaching in the future can be entrusted to computers. [Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Teachers College, 1998, pp. 71-72]

11 Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. This is an art very difficult to impart. Whenever a textbook is written of real educational worth, you may be quite certain that some reviewer will say that it will be difficult to teach from it. Of course it will be difficult to teach from it. If it were easy, the book ought to be burned; for it cannot be educational. In education, as elsewhere, the broad primrose path leads to a nasty place. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays,* Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 6-7]

12 Teachers themselves are perceived as competent to the extent that their students excel, with excellence defined in an ever narrowing arc. Whenever teachers believe that their role is to ensure high test scores rather than to help students learn, they pressure themselves and in the process use controlling, autocratic teaching techniques. Here control means emphasizing extrinsic rewards (particularly when they are dispensed competitively), allowing students little choice for how they go about learning, and threatening to withdraw emotional support as a means of punishment. ...

With standardization and greater accountability in school performance comes superficial coverage, and the possibility that we may be simply teaching children a series of "tricks" that enable them to perform well on standardized tests yet leave them deficient in basic understanding. ...

Today it is only the brave, dedicated teacher who deemphasizes immediate performance goals for the sake of teaching to more lasting objectives, which include encouraging the will to learn and the productive use of the mind, especially when these goals are not easily measured. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 227-228]

13 FairTest makes [this] point in its "National Resolution on High-Stakes Testing": "The over-reliance on high-stakes standardized testing in state and federal accountability systems is undermining educational quality and equity in U.S. public schools by hampering educators' efforts to focus on the broad range of learning experiences that promote the innovation, creativity, problem solving, collaboration, communication,

critical thinking, and deep subject matter knowledge that will allow students to thrive in a democracy and an increasingly global society and economy." [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 162-163]

14 Bad working conditions are not the only reason why we do not have enough able teachers, or why good ones are prevented from performing as they should. ... Not only do we pay our teachers too little for work they are expected to do, we also fail in this country to give them the respect that the worth of their service to the community deserves. Teachers in the United States do not enjoy the social status that the importance of their position merits.

Add to all this the many administrative, public relations, and quasi-menial duties that teachers are asked to perform, duties that take mind and energy away from teaching, and it is easy to understand why our educational system is not able to attract many of the ablest young into the teaching profession, or to turn those who do join the ranks into adequate teachers. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 57-58]

15 [I] am not saying that among our fifty thousand bureaucrats there are no persons of real worth. The issue is precisely that of the effect of the institution upon the individual. The institution, the educational system in all its branches, is corrupting to the individual, and though the corruption may in many cases take the form of considerable expertise, the fact remains that competence is destroyed. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 275-276]

16 Let me say again, as I have said before, that schools are worse than most of the people in them and that many of these people do many harmful things they would rather not do, and a great many other harmful things that they do not even see as harmful. The whole of the school is much worse than the sum of its parts. [John Holt, *Escape From Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children*, 1974, HoltGWS, 2013, pp. 167-168]

17 [T]housands of humane, caring people work in schools as teachers and aides and administrators, but the abstract logic of the institution overwhelms their individual

contributions. [John Gatto, "The Psychopathic School," 1990, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, New Society, 2005, pp. 21-22]



18 It has long been known that nearly all college students who want to become teachers and who as seniors elect the education courses required for certification, fall back discomfited by what they are asked to learn. Though young and moved by a generous impulse, they can see that the "methods" taught are mere word-spinning and that while the relation of method to subjects is non-existent, subjects themselves are the last concern of educationism.

In short, teacher training is based on a strong anti-intellectual bias, enhanced by a total lack of imagination. The trainers live in a thick cloud of nomenclature, formulas, "objectives," evaluations, and "strategies." ...

What then are the native qualities to look for in the person who, though not one of those born to the task, would make a good teacher? ... brains enough to feel bewildered and revolted by the educationist language—and courage enough to admit it. [Jacques Barzun, *Begin Here: The Forgotten Conditions of Teaching and Learning*, U of Chicago P, 1991, pp. 97-98]

19 Consistently, for decades, those college students who have majored in education have been among the least qualified of all college students, and the professors who taught them have been among the least respected by their colleagues elsewhere in the college or university. The word "contempt" appears repeatedly in discussions of the way most academic students and professors view their counterparts in the field of education. ...

When the president of Harvard University retired in 1933, he told the institution's overseers that Harvard's Graduate School of Education was a "kitten that ought to be drowned." More recently, a knowledgeable academic declared, "the educationists have set the lowest possible standards and require the least amount of hard work." Education schools and education departments have been called "the intellectual slums" of the university. ...

In short, some of the least qualified students, taught by the least qualified professors in the lowest quality courses supply most American public school teachers. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 23-25]

20 The biggest liability of the American public school system is the legal requirement that education courses be taken by people who seek careers as tenured teachers. These courses are almost unanimously condemned—by scholars who have studied them, teachers who have taken them, and anyone else with the misfortune to have encountered them. The crucial importance of these courses, and the irreparable damage they do, is not because of what they teach or do not teach. It is because they are the filter through which the flow of teachers must pass. Mediocrity and incompetence flow freely through these filters, but they filter out many high-ability people, who refuse to subject themselves to the inanity of education courses, which are the laughing stock of many universities. One of the great advantages of the private schools is that they do not have to rely on getting their teachers from such sources. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 288-289)

21 The professional educators have been denounced as "self-serving paragons of mediocrity," who have imposed patterns of accreditation on the various local educational systems, making it impossible for teachers of the young to exercise their craft unless they enroll in certain prescribed courses in pedagogy. These courses are often characterized as irrelevant if not detrimental to a genuine teaching process whose fruits should be the acquisition of the skills of communication, familiarity with the cultural heritage of our civilization, and basic knowledge of the major intellectual disciplines. [Sidney Hook, *Education for Modern Man: A New Perspective*, 1946, Wipf and Stock, 2019, p. 10]

22 For the most part, the members of the teaching profession are overtrained and undereducated. Teaching is an art and a teacher must be trained, but since the technique is one of communicating knowledge and inculcating discipline, it is not educational psychology and courses in method and pedagogy which train a teacher, but the liberal arts. A good teacher must be a liberal artist. Further, a teacher should have a cultivated mind, generally cultivated regardless of his field of special interest, for he must be the visible and moving representative of the cultural tradition to his students. [Mortimer J.

Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 78-79]



23 Public-school teaching in the United States is ... an indigenous petty civil service, characterized by the usual gradations of rank and bureaucratic modes of organization. A civil service has its traditions, derived from the duties for which it is responsible. They may be—in the public school they are—traditions of responsibility, benevolence, and devotion to duty, and they influence the actual conduct of the school system strongly. But the traditions of a civil service are not those of chivalry; they do not emphasize courage, feeling, imagination, breadth of vision, and independence of action. In the tradition of the school, a teacher who manifested these qualities would be thought to need help in adapting himself to functioning well in a group situation. He would get lots of it. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, pp. 128-129]

24 Next to the clerk in holy orders, the fellow with the foulest job in the world is the schoolmaster. Both are underpaid, both fall steadily in authority and dignity, and both wear out their hearts trying the impossible. How much the world asks of them, and how little they can actually deliver! ...

The art of pedagogics becomes a sort of puerile magic, a thing of preposterous secrets, a grotesque compound of false premises and illogical conclusions. Every year sees a craze for some new solution of the teaching enigma, an endless series of flamboyant arcana. ... The aim seems to be to reduce the whole teaching process to a sort of automatic reaction, to discover some master formula that will not only take the place of competence and resourcefulness in the teacher but that will also create an artificial receptivity in the child. Teaching becomes a thing in itself, separable from and superior to the thing taught. [H. L. Mencken, "The Educational Process," 1918, *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, Vintage, 1982, pp. 301-302]

25 Professor David Hawkins, in his article "What It Means To Teach," said some good words about teaching. ... He says, in part: "...the teacher is one who acquires authority

through *a compact of trust*, in which the teacher seeks to extend the powers of the learner and promises to abridge them only transiently and to the end of extending them. ..."

"A compact of trust." Yes—but how can there be a compact of trust when the student is not free to choose what he shall learn, or when, or how, or with how much and what kind of help? How can there be a compact of trust when the student is not free to choose or to change his teacher? How can there be a compact of trust when the teacher may be obliged (as I once was), in order to keep his job, to do things that he knows will harm the student, destroy his confidence and ability to learn? [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 60]

26 A teacher who does not use fear and does not need to use it, who makes his students less afraid, *and so makes them harder for others to make afraid*, threatens every other teacher in the S-chool. His natural authority undermines their official authority. They will see him as standing on the wrong side—the student side—of the line between Us and Them. Thus, S-chools tell teachers all the time not to "fraternize" with students, to "keep a professional distance." [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 205-206]

27 Society is not willing to let adolescents run loose and parents are not willing to tend them at home. Therefore they must go to school. Almost all teachers, from kindergarten to graduate school, are to a greater or lesser degree being paid to keep students in a room or busy with homework who don't want to be there. [Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*, Oxford UP, 1986, pp. 91-92]

28 Only when all parents, not just rich ones, have a truly free choice in education, when they can take their children out of a school they don't like, and have a choice of many others to send them to, or the possibility of starting their own, or of educating their children outside of school altogether—only then will we teachers begin to stop being what most of us still are and if we are honest know we are, which is jailers and baby-sitters, cops without uniforms, and begin to be professionals, freely exercising an important, valued, and honored skill and art. [John Holt, *What Do I Do On Monday?*, 1970, quoted by Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 75]

29 [F]orced attendance fundamentally transforms schools into jails. Students know they are there because they must be there. That has subtle, corrosive effects on students, teachers, and administrators. ... One should not expect anyone to be both a good teacher and a good prison guard. Yet that is what is expected of teachers today ... [Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 86]

30 Next to the right to life itself, the most fundamental of all human rights is the right to control our own minds and thoughts. That means, the right to decide for ourselves how we will explore the world around us, think about our own and other persons' experiences, and find and make the meaning of our own lives. Whoever takes that right away from us, as the educators do, attacks the very center of our being and does *us* a most profound and lasting injury. He tells us, in effect, that we cannot be trusted even to think, that for all our lives we must depend on others to tell us the meaning of our world and our lives, and that any meaning we may make for ourselves, out of our own experience, has no value.

Education, with its supporting system of compulsory and competitive schooling, all its carrots and sticks, its grades, diplomas, and credentials, now seems to me perhaps the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern and worldwide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and "fans," driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy, and fear. My concern is not to improve "education" but to do away with it, to end the ugly and antihuman business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves.

This does not mean that no one should ever influence or try to influence what others think and feel. ... But I refuse to put these others in a position where they feel they have no choice but to agree with me, or seem to agree. I want them to have the right, if they wish, to reject absolutely any and all of my ideas, as I would want and demand for myself the right to reject theirs. Also, I have learned that no one can truly say Yes to an idea, mine or anyone else's, unless he can freely say No to it. This is why, except as an occasional visitor, I will no longer do my teaching in compulsory and competitive schools. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 3-4]

Related:

– What is "reality of encounter" and why is it important in education?
– What are the effects of coercion in education?
– What is the nature of authority? How is it gained or lost?
– How does "global competition" effect education?

20. What are the effects of coercion in education?

1 The case for the greatest possible freedom in education is a very strong one. To begin with, absence of freedom involves conflicts with adults, which frequently have a much more profound psychological effect than was realized until very recently. The child who is in any way coerced tends to respond with hatred, and if, as is usual, he is not able to give free vent to his hatred, it festers inwardly, and may sink into the unconscious with all kinds of strange consequences throughout the rest of life. ... Or again, hatred of the authorities who oppress the child may become transferred into a desire to inflict equal oppression later upon the next generation. Or there may be merely a general moroseness, making pleasant social and personal relations impossible. I found one day in school a boy of medium size ill-treating a smaller boy. I expostulated, but he replied: 'The bigs hit me, so I hit the babies; that's fair.' In these words he epitomized the history of the human race.

Another effect of compulsion in education is that it destroys originality and intellectual interest. Desire for knowledge, at any rate for a good deal of knowledge, is natural to the young, but is generally destroyed by the fact that they are given more than they desire or can assimilate. Children who are forced to eat acquire a loathing for food, and children who are forced to learn acquire a loathing for knowledge. ... A great many of these troubles are avoided by making lessons voluntary. There is no longer friction between teacher and pupil, and in a fairly large proportion of cases the pupils consider the knowledge imparted by the teacher worth having. Their initiative is not destroyed, because it is by their own choice that they learn, and they do not accumulate masses of undigested hate to lie festering in the unconscious throughout the rest of life. [Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, 1932, Routledge Classics, 2009, pp. 17-18]

2 In all respects, reliance upon [coerced] attention ... is a wasteful method, bringing bad temper and nervous wear and tear as well as imperfect result. The teacher who can get along by keeping spontaneous interest excited must be regarded as the teacher with the greatest skill. [William James, "Talks to Teachers," 1882, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*, Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1992, p. 773]

3 There is little joy in most of the learning [students] are now compelled to do. ... Without some joy in learning ... basic schooling cannot initiate the young into the life of learning,

let alone give them the skill and incentive to engage in it further. Only the student whose mind has been engaged in thinking for itself is an active participant in the learning process that is essential to basic schooling. [Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, 1982, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998, p. 32]

4 Experience has persuaded me, somewhat to my surprise, that it is possible to give adequate instruction, and to produce highly educated human beings, without imposing any obligation to be present at lessons. To do this requires a combination of circumstances which is not at present possible on a large scale. It requires among adults a genuine and spontaneous interest in intellectual pursuits. It requires small classes. It requires sympathy and tact and skill in the teacher. And it requires an environment in which it is possible to turn a child out of a class and tell him to go and play, if he wishes to be in class solely for the purpose of creating a disturbance. It will be a long time before these conditions can be realized in ordinary school, and therefore, for the present, compulsory attendance in class is likely to be necessary in the great majority of cases. [Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, 1932, Routledge Classics, 2009, p. 24]

5 If s-chools, doing places for children, are honest, active, and interesting enough, they will not need to be compulsory; as long as they are compulsory, they don't need to be good, and most of them will not be. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 208]

6 The crisis in public education, like the hastening dissolution of other of our social institutions, creates anxiety and doubt, and we respond as anxious people do: we try to impose order by force, imagining that if we can obliterate the symptoms, we will have cured the disease. We speak increasingly of control, as if we feared that everything would collapse into nothing if we let loose our (illusory) hold on things. And so I have been urging one simple truth through all these pages: that the educational function does not rest upon our ability to control, or our will to instruct, but upon our human nature and the nature of experience. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, p. 246]

7 I readily concede that a great deal of first-rate education goes on in our government school systems; but I must insist that the first-rate production is in spite of, not because of, the coercive or governmental aspects. Untold millions of teachers and students, in many of their day-to-day relationships, are on a voluntary, not a coercive basis; to a large extent the students are selecting their teachers. But wherever coercion insinuates itself into schooling—that is, the upbringing process—be it government or private, an imbalance of know-how and wisdom will become evident. Wisdom will decrease, not increase, when the reliance is on duplication by force; wisdom cannot be grafted onto a carbon copy. [Leonard Read, *Anything That's Peaceful: The Case for the Free Market*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1964, p. 203]

8 To ... make active, competent, and initiating citizens who can produce a community culture and a noble recreation, we need a very different education than the schooling that we have been getting. ...

On the whole, the education must be voluntary rather than compulsory, for no growth to freedom occurs except by intrinsic motivation. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, pp. 61-62]

9 Contrasting the means to be employed [coercion] with the work to be done [character formation], we are at once struck with their utter unfitness. Instead of creating a new internal state which shall exhibit itself in better deeds, coercion can manifestly do nothing but forcibly mold externals into a coarse semblance of such a state. In the family, as in society, it can simply restrain; it cannot educate. ... As someone has well said, the utmost that severity can do is make hypocrites; it can never make converts. [Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, 1851, quoted by Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 59]

10 We must stop looking for some new use of force every time we encounter something that upsets us or arouses our pity. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 214-215]

11 We should also think about how an act of control is exercised: Do we justify it with a reasonable explanation? ... Do we pause to ask whether what we are getting the child to

do (or stop doing) is really necessary? Are we thinking about how best to help the child become a responsible person (as opposed to just how to get her to obey)? ...

Some who support more coercive strategies assume that children will run wild if they are not controlled. However, the children for whom this is true typically turn out to be those accustomed to being controlled—those who are not trusted, given explanations, encouraged to think for themselves, helped to develop and internalize good values, and so on. Control breeds the need for more control, which then is used to justify the use of control. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 33]

12 Nothing interferes more with our freely turning toward the light we choose than to be coercively turned toward someone else's choice of lights. ... The compulsion directing American "education" today accounts for the dearth of voluntary turning and leaves the false impression that freely turning toward the light has no vitality and, thus, could not be relied upon. But, is it not true that you, whoever you are, trust yourself in this respect? Then, why not trust others?

Assuming no compulsions, every person above the moronic level would freely seek those lights befitting his unique requirements. One couldn't live unless he did so; and the will to survive is strong within all of us. [Leonard Read, *The Coming Aristocracy*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1969, pp. 122-124]

13 It is truly amazing, as pointed up by our findings, that if people are ongoingly treated as if they were either passive mechanisms or barbarians needing to be controlled, they will begin to act more and more that way. As they are controlled, for example, they are likely to act more and more as if they need to be controlled. That fact has led some commentators to conclude that society should use more controls. It has led to the call for greater discipline, for more heavy handedness. But ironically, it should call for just the opposite. This phenomenon behooves us to insist even more emphatically that it is time to stop looking for the easy answers contained in the reliance on control and instead to start employing more autonomy-supportive approaches. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 83-84]

14 To me the worst thing seems to be for a school principally to work with methods of fear, force, and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the sound sentiments, the sincerity, and the self-confidence of the pupil. It produces the submissive subject. ... It is comparatively simple to keep the school free from this worst of all evils. Give into the power of the teacher the fewest possible coercive measures, so that the only source of the pupil's respect for the teacher is the human and intellectual qualities of the latter. ...

What can be done that this spirit be gained in the school? ... First, teachers should grow up in such schools. Second, the teacher should be given extensive liberty in the selection of the material to be taught and the methods of teaching employed by him. For it is true also of him that pleasure in the shaping of his work is killed by force and exterior pressure. [Albert Einstein, "On Education," 1936, *Ideas and Opinions*, Three Rivers, 1982, pp. 61-63]

15 What most concerns me [are] ... the things that S-chools teach *simply by the fact of being S-chools*, of having the power to compel children to attend, to tell them what to learn, and to grade, rank, and label them. ...

The first message that S-chools, like any other compulsory institution, send to the people who attend them is a message of distrust and contempt: If we didn't make you come here you wouldn't learn anything, you'd just waste your time, ... never do anything worthwhile, grow up to be a bum. ...

Along with these messages ... goes this one: ... If you want to learn something of any importance, you must get it *from* a teacher, *in* a school. From this it follows that understanding is not an activity but a thing, a commodity. It is not something you do or make for yourself, but something you get. It is scarce, valuable, and expensive. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 171-172]

16 If we do not challenge the assumption that valuable knowledge is a commodity which under certain circumstances may be forced into the consumer, society will be increasingly dominated by sinister pseudo schools and totalitarian managers of information. Pedagogical therapists will drug their pupils more in order to teach them better, and students will drug themselves more to gain relief from the pressures of

teachers and the race for certificates. [Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 71-72]



17 [N]o kingdom can maintain itself by force alone. Force does not work the way its advocates seem to think it does. It does not, for example, reveal to the victim the strength of his adversary. On the contrary, it reveals the weakness, even the panic of his adversary ... [James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 1973]

18 [T]he whole issue [of compulsory attendance], as we know it in this country, testifies to a really peculiar anxiety and lack of faith on the part of adults. Would children really abandon school if they were no longer compelled to attend? Or, more properly, would the acquisition of skills and knowledge and the participation in large-scale social life with their peers suddenly lose all attractiveness? The idea of *school*—not perhaps in its present bureaucratized form—is one of the most powerful social inventions that we possess. It rests squarely on the deepest of necessities and draws on motives we could not disavow even if we wished to. Teaching is one of the few natural functions of adults. Vis-à-vis the young, we simply cannot escape it. Too, our legitimate demand of the young—that in one style or another they be worthy inheritors of our world—is deeply respected by the young themselves. They form their notions of selfhood, individual pride, citizenship, etc., in precisely the terms that we put forward, converting our demands into goals and even into ideas of glory. I cannot believe all this is so feeble that we need to rest the function of education upon acts of compulsion, with all the damage this entails.

If compulsion is damaging and unwise, its antithesis—a vacuum of free choice—is unreal. And in fact we cannot deal with the problem in these terms, for the real question is not, What shall we do about classes? but, What shall we do about our relationships with the young? How shall we deepen them, enliven them, make them freer, more amiable, and at the same time more serious? How shall we broaden the area of mutual experience? If these things can be done, the question of school attendance, or classroom attendance, will take a simpler and more logical form, will lie closer to the fact that classroom instruction is, after all, a method (one among many) and deserves to be criticized in terms of its efficiency. It is not the be-all and end-an of a child's existence.

[George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 109-111]

19 If education is not to go on making adolescents "mass" more and more thoroughly and destructively, the young and the schools must be given a wider range of alternatives with respect to one another. The young must not be compelled to submit to year after year of education that denatures them. The schools must not be compelled to accommodate the hordes of youngsters unqualified by earlier experience to participate in its specialized educational functions, and to permit them to disrupt those functions for which they are unqualified and in which they see no value. The young must not be worn into submission, during their most vulnerable and crucial years of growth, to the ignoble view of life that dominates the schools. They must not be constrained to relinquish the precise and significant image of themselves that can only be developed when personal experience is privately explored under conditions of trust and intimacy.

Basically, then, I disapprove of compulsory school attendance in itself. I see no valid moral reason to single out the young for this special legal encumbrance. The economic reasons are compelling enough; but they are likewise contemptible. A people have no right to cling to economic arrangements that can be made halfway workable only by imposing an infantile and unproductive status on adolescents and indoctrinating them with a need for trashy goods and shallow, meretricious relationships that they know to be degrading. There are social reasons, too; the family has lost many of its functions through adaptation to social change and now has no more place for its young than any other social institution has and no real basis for dealing with them. If the children were not in school, many parents would go mad; and the schools, for all their defects, are more orderly and safer places, with a little more care and better food, than many homes.

Nevertheless, I find it odd that children should be confined because adults are incompetent to design, or too grossly impaired emotionally to accept and operate, a society that works. It is, I would very strongly stress, the *compulsory* feature alone that I object to. Public education, in the sense of a system of public supported schools open without charge to any student who wishes to attend them, is not a debatable issue. ...

Should the young be compelled to go to any school at all? I should prefer that they be left free; that youth be provided with a wealth of diverse opportunities for employment and self-employment, with school attendance prominent among them and left to work out their own arrangements to meet their own needs with the assurance of a reasonable

level of state support—both financial and in the form of services of trained personnel available to give *solicited* advice. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage / Random House, 1965, pp. 248-251]

20 Freedom of the mind requires not only, or not even especially, the absence of legal constraints but the presence of alternative thoughts. The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities, that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable, that removes the sense that there is an outside. [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon & Schuster, 1987, p. 249]

21 "But what will happen to the students if they don't go to school?" "How will they learn?" ...

Even while asking [such questions] teachers reveal their unconscious and contaminating attitudes. They can no longer imagine what children will do "outside" schools. They regard them as young monsters who will, if released from adult authority or help, disrupt the order of things. What is more, adults no longer are capable of imagining learning or child-adult relationships outside the schools. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 812]

22 The heart of the deception rests on a single, well-constructed lie: the pretense of free choice within a managed framework of "alternative" ideas. This point lies right at the heart of the effectiveness of public school. It does not lock up children in a diplomatic compound unless we can induce them to believe that they are living in an ordinary structure—and, still more important, that they live there by their own free will. There must be the illusion of free options. There must be, too, a certain area of seemingly free motions. The compound must not seem to be a compound. The quarantine must appear to be no quarantine at all, but only a convenient form of tactful disaffiliation from unpleasant matters in the outside world. The prison must not seem to be a prison if it is to do the prison job correctly. [Jonathan Kozol, *The Night is Dark and I Am Far From Home*, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, p. 96]

23 To discuss this matter clearly we must first understand the nature of freedom; and to do this we must differentiate between *overt authority and anonymous authority*. Overt authority is exercised directly and explicitly. The person in authority frankly tells the one who is subject to him, "You must do this. If you do not, certain sanctions will be applied against you." Anonymous authority tends to hide that force is being used. Anonymous authority pretends that there is no authority, that all is done with the consent of the individual. While the teacher of the past said to Johnny, "You must do this. If you don't, I'll punish you"; today's teacher says, "I'm sure you'll like to do this." Here, the sanction for disobedience is not corporal punishment, but the suffering face of the parent, or what is worse, conveying the feeling of not being "adjusted," of not acting as the crowd acts. Overt authority used physical force; anonymous authority employs psychic manipulation. [Erich Fromm, Foreword, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, by A. S. Neill, Hart, 1960, https://archive.org/details/Summerhill-English-A.S.Neill]

24 [F]ear of failure is the pulse of school life. Remove the fear of failure and education in America would stop as if its heart had been cut out. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, p. 11]

25 Most S-chools do not want people in them who deal with their students on a basis of natural authority—trust, affection, and genuine respect—rather than fear. A teacher who does not use fear and does not need to use it, who makes his students less afraid, *and so makes them harder for others to make afraid*, threatens every other teacher in the S-chool. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 205-206]

26 It is not that authority has disappeared, nor even that it has lost in strength, but that it has been transformed from the overt authority of force to the anonymous authority of persuasion and suggestion. In other words, in order to be adaptable, modern man is obliged to nourish the illusion that everything is done with his consent, even though such consent be extracted from him by subtle manipulation. His consent is obtained, as it were, behind his back, or behind his consciousness. The same artifices are employed in progressive education. The child is forced to swallow the pill, but the pill is given a sugar coating. Parents and teachers have confused true non-authoritarian education with *education by means of persuasion and hidden coercion*. Progressive education has been

thus debased. It has failed to become what it was intended to be and has never developed as it was meant to. [Erich Fromm, Foreword, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, by A. S. Neill, Hart, 1960, https://archive.org/details/Summerhill-English-A.S.Neill]

27 One of the most common approaches to discipline in modern society involves making the provision of love, acceptance, and esteem contingent upon people's behaving in certain ways. This withdrawal-of-love approach underlies one of the tragic aspects of life; namely that in many circumstances autonomy and relatedness are turned against each other by people in one-up positions. ... [T]he social world can capitalize on people's vulnerability to being controlled—to having their autonomy robbed—by their need to be related to others. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, p. 112]

28 If we want our students to trust that we care for them, then we need to display our affection without demanding that they behave or perform in certain ways in return. It's not that we don't want and expect certain behaviors; we do. But our concern or affection does not depend on it. [Marilyn Watson, *Learning to Trust*, 2003, quoted by Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, p. 118]

29 So far the children are everywhere sent to school by force, while parents are compelled to send their children to school by the severity of the law, or by cunning, or by offering them advantages, whereas the masses everywhere study of their own accord and regard education as good.

How is this? The need of education lies in every man; the people love and seek education, as they love and seek the air for breathing; the government and society burn with the desire to educate the masses, and yet, notwithstanding all the force of cunning and the persistency of governments and societies, the masses constantly manifest their dissatisfaction with the education which is offered to them, and step by step submit only to force.

As at every conflict, so also here, it was necessary to solve the question: What is more lawful, the resistance, or the action itself? Must the resistance be broken, or the action be changed?

So far, as may be seen from history, the question has been solved in favour of the state and the educating society. The resistance has been acknowledged to be unlawful, men seeing in it the principle of evil inherent in man, and so ... the state has made use of force and cunning in order to annihilate the people's resistance. [Leo Tolstoy, "On Popular Education," 1862, *Tolstoy On Education*, U of Chicago P, 1967, p. 5]

30 The compulsory structure of the school excludes the possibility of all progress. [Leo Tolstoy, "On Popular Education," 1862, *Tolstoy On Education*, U of Chicago P, 1967, p. 18]

31 Compulsory education is the chink in the armor of American capitalism. We are expected to value initiative and contract, but base our educational system on conformity and compulsion. [Thomas Szasz, *Words to the Wise*, Transaction, 2004, p. 40]

32 Sensitivity can never be awakened through compulsion. One may compel a child to be outwardly quiet, but one has not come face to face with that which is making him obstinate, impudent, and so on. Compulsion breeds antagonism and fear. Reward and punishment in any form only make the mind subservient and dull; and if this is what we desire, then education through compulsion is an excellent way to proceed.

But such education cannot help us to understand the child, nor can it build a right social environment in which separatism and hatred will cease to exist. In the love of the child, right education is implied. But most of us do not love our children; we are ambitious for them—which means that we are ambitious for ourselves. [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, pp. 31-32]

33 We seem to think that freedom is an ultimate end, a goal, and that in order to become free we must first submit ourselves to various forms of suppression and intimidation. We hope to achieve freedom through conformity; but are not the means as important as the end? Do not the means shape the end?

To have peace, one must employ peaceful means; for if the means are violent, how can the end be peaceful? If the end is freedom, the beginning must be free, for the end and the beginning are one. There can be self-knowledge and intelligence only when there is

freedom at the very outset ... [Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, HarperCollins, 1953, p. 59]

34 Imagine: *We will insure freedom to "the people" by denying freedom to them in education, for if their education is entrusted to freedom they will remain uneducated and, thus, will not be able to enjoy the blessings of freedom!* Illogical? How can we ever expect a people brought up on coercion to be free of demigod mentalities? Does a coercive educational system have the intellectual soil and climate where freedom and wisdom may flourish? The answers lie all about us. [Leonard Read, *Anything That's Peaceful*: *The Case for the Free Market*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1964, pp. 205-206]

35 What is the goal of parenting? It's to help a child grow up to be a decent human being, a mensch, a person with *compassion, commitment, and caring*. How does one go about humanizing a child? Only by using humane methods, by recognizing that the process is the method, that ends do not justify the means, and that in our attempt to be effective in getting children to behave, we do not damage them emotionally. [Haim Ginott, *Between Parent and Child*, 1965, Three Rivers, 2003, p. 192]

36 [M]any teachers believe in the "spinach theory" approach. This approach can be roughly summarized as, "Although they do not want to eat spinach now, if I force them to eat it they will come in time to appreciate my making them eat it."

I am concerned about this type of thinking for two reasons. First, I question how many people do end up liking the "spinach" when introduced to it in this way. For every one anecdote I hear teachers relating about the students coming to like "spinach," I hear ten students relating how much they hated their teachers for forcing it on them.

Secondly, even if more students did learn to like "spinach" being introduced to it in this way, I would still be concerned that they might learn from the teacher's behavior that if you believe strongly about something, it is all right to "force it on someone else for his own good." I have seen too much damage come from such thinking to want to see it perpetuated in our educational institutions. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 71-72]

37 What's Orwellian about the status quo? Most fundamentally, the idea of compulsory enlightenment. Educators routinely defend compulsion on the ground that few students *want* to explore ideas and culture. They're right about the students' tastes but forget a deeper truth: intrinsically valuable education *requires* eager students. Mandatory study of ideas and culture spoils the journey. ...

Regimentation may be a good way to mold external behavior, but it's a bad way to win hearts and minds—and a terrible way to foster thoughtful commitment. ...

Even top students respond to incentivized soulcraft by gaming the system, not reforming their priorities. ... When schools require enlightenment, students predictably respond by feigning interest in ideas and culture, giving educators a false sense of accomplishment. ...

The rise of the Internet undercuts the Machiavellian line that intellectual force-feeding ultimately blossoms into sincere appreciation. Today's adults are the product of over a decade of mandatory exposure to abstract ideas and high culture. If educational force-feeding worked well, most educated adults would adore these nerdy realms—and eagerly tap the Internet to revisit them. To understate, they rarely do. ...

[T]he Internet proves low consumption of ideas and culture stems from apathy, not poverty or inconvenience. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 260-261, 242]

38 Force-feeding ideas and culture to recalcitrant youths often sparks resentment rather than appreciation. ...

"What alternative is there?"

Patience. Young philistines have a lifetime to reconsider their intellectual apathy.

"That's wishful thinking."

When free machines provide instant access to the totality of human knowledge, humanists should count their blessings. The life of the mind is now open to all. I'm not convinced that mandatory enlightenment ever made sense, but either way, it's obsolete. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 284]

39 Trying to force students to learn or threatening to punish them if they don't learn inevitably has the opposite effect from what you want to achieve, no matter how much pressure your teaching responsibilities put upon you.

It would be better if you could regard your job (if the official theory of learning would allow you to do so) not as the *instructor* who organizes the learning that students are supposed to do but as the *guide* who makes what we would like students to learn interesting, comprehensible, and accessible. This won't always be easy, it won't always be done on time, and sometimes it may be impossible to do at all. This is reality, whatever approach you take to learning. But there will be much less frustration, despair, and resentment on all sides even if your efforts to involve individuals in particular activities fail than if you try to enforce learning with exercises, drills, tests, slogans, and discriminatory labels. [Frank Smith, *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Teachers College, 1998, p. 80]

40 Many teachers feel helpless when told not to motivate students using punishment, reward, guilt, or shame, or a sense of obligation to duty. What's left, they ask? What is left are connections between people and a desire to contribute to one's own self-fulfillment and the well-being of others. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 112-113]

41 This is the whole point of Neill's Summerhill, that the discovery of one's own subjective freedom can occur only in the freest possible learning circumstances. Moreover, freedom is the only medium in which the I-Thou relation can develop; it is the only vehicle in which genuine *communion*, in Buber's word, can be effected between teacher and learner.

"Freedom is the vibrating needle, the fruitful zero. Compulsion in education means disunion, it means humiliation and rebelliousness. Communion in education ... means being opened up and drawn in. Freedom in education is the possibility of communion; it cannot be dispensed with and it cannot be made use of in itself; without it nothing succeeds, but neither does anything succeed by means of it: it is the run before the jump, the tuning of the violin, the confirmation of that primal and mighty potentiality which it cannot even begin to actualize." [*Between Man and Man*, p. 91] [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, pp. 152-153]

42 [Education] occurs willy-nilly, by chance or planning—at the mother's breast, in the locker room, in the ghetto streets, in kitchen drudgery, and in school servitude. ... [M]uch of the "content" of what is learned comes from the context, the environment, the emotional climate, rather than from any stated curricular. In simpleminded but well-meaning efforts to provide good education through schooling we have largely ignored precisely those surrounding factors that teach more than teachers and books. And the major factor ... is compulsion. Compulsory education, like compulsory love, is a contradiction in terms. Where there is compulsion a person can learn, but he learns mostly about compulsion rather than reading, writing, and arithmetic. He learns to be docile or rebellious; he learns to sit still for long hours without thinking; he learns to fear or hate or be sickeningly dependent upon authority figures. Surely that element of education must go. If schools remain (be they "free" schools or traditional ones) the first business of the day should be to establish clearly and unequivocally that anyone is free to leave—the classroom, the school—whenever he wishes, and that there are real alternatives, places to go, things to do, that are safe, stimulating, authorized. [Judson Jerome, "After Illich, What?" *After Deschooling, What?*, edited by Alan Gartner, Colin Greer, and Frank Riessman, Perennial / Harper & Row, 1973, pp. 107-108]

Related:
– What is the nature of authority? How is it gained or lost?
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?
– Why might young people dislike school?

21. What is the nature of authority? How is it gained or lost?

1 From authority there is no escape. [Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death*, U of Chicago P, 1985, p. xi]

2 Everyone older is a role model, and the elders are unrecognizedly inspiring in that young men or young women, without even being aware they are doing it, "breathe in" the way they are to conduct themselves today and tomorrow through their inescapable association with and fealty toward those who are a generation ahead of them. [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, p. 103]

3 [T]he important point here is only that you cannot anyhow get rid of authority in education; it is not so much ... that parental authority ought to be preserved, as that it cannot be destroyed. Mr. Bernard Shaw once said that he hated the idea of forming a child's mind. In that case Mr. Bernard Shaw had better hang himself; for he hates something inseparable from human life. ... The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he chooses. ... Now we must all accept the responsibility of this intellectual violence. Education is violent; because it is creative. It is creative because it is human. [G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 1910, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927, pp. 252-253, https://archive.org/details/whatswrongwithwo00ches/mode/2up]

4 Insofar as the child is not yet acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is. In any case, however, the educators here stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is. This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world. ...

In education this responsibility for the world takes the form of authority. The authority of the educator and the qualifications of the teacher are not the same thing. Although a measure of qualification is indispensable for authority, the highest possible qualification can never by itself beget authority. The teacher's qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about that world. Vis-à-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, p. 189]

5 [I]f the teacher knows something that the students value, and she offers to teach it to them in a non-coercive way, they will learn to have respect for her authority. But she has earned that respect, not demanded it. The student is the final authority about whether or not the teacher has authority, a truth which students clearly demonstrate every day. Fear of authority masking as respect for authority is easy to get; just give the people with titles the legal power to mete out punishments and rewards. [Marshal Rosenberg, *Life-Enriching Education: Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict, and Enhance Relationships*, Puddle Dancer, 2003, pp. 112-113]

6 In *The Lives of Children*, Dennison made the important distinction between natural authority, which rests on experience, competence, wisdom, and commitment, on the respect, trust, and love of one person for another, and official or coercive authority, which rests only on the power to bribe, to threaten, and to punish. Many people find it hard to understand this difference, or to see that coercive authority does not complement and support natural authority, but undermines and destroys it. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 106]

7 I have used the phrase "naked authority" to signify authority teachers arrogate to themselves when they expect students to accept what they tell them simply because they are teachers. The only authority to which genuine teachers, as opposed to indoctrinators, should appeal is the authority of the relevant reasons or the evidence supporting whatever is to be learned. In the absence of such authority, teachers cannot help students acquire knowledge that is understood. They can only indoctrinate them with the opinions they may or may not retain for long in their memories. Opinions adopted on the naked authority of teachers have little durability. [Mortimer Adler,

Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 172-173]

8 Authority is given or it is fraudulent; it cannot be taken by force or ambition. [Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death*, U of Chicago P, 1985, p. 161]

9 [A]uthority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, pp. 92-93]

10 The good news is that parents naturally have authority over kids. We're older, we're more experienced, and (hopefully) we have better self-control than our kids. ... The problem comes when we try to force this authority. Kids need limits to feel secure, and it's right for us to play our natural role as the authorities in our families. But if we repeatedly push kids to do things against their will, if we argue with them about the same things over and over, if we lose our temper and get into shouting matches, our natural authority goes down the toilet. We're lowered to the same level as an out-of-control child. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 38]

11 Being-authority is grounded not only in the individual's competence to fulfill certain social functions, but equally so in the very essence of a personality that has achieved a high degree of growth and integration. Such persons radiate authority and do not have to give orders, threaten, bribe. They are highly developed individuals who demonstrate by what they are—and not mainly by what they do or say—what human beings can be. The great Masters of Living were such authorities, and to a lesser degree of perfection, such individuals may be found on all educational levels and in the most diverse cultures. (The problem of education hinges on this point. If parents were more developed themselves and rested in their own center, the opposition between authoritarian and laissez-faire education would hardly exist. Needing this being-authority, the child reacts to it with great eagerness; on the other hand, the child rebels against pressure or neglect or "overfeeding" by people who show by their own behavior that they themselves have not made the effort they expect from the growing child.) [Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, 1976, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 33]

12 [N]o strict and affectionate discipline can apply to children without applying, first and more rigorously, to their parents. From the rigor of that self-application, authority descends through the generations and so allows children, in the family order, to correct their parents; for it is the parents, first, who must be an obedient people; then it is that children have someone to obey. [Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death*, U of Chicago P, 1985, p. 208]

13 When I ask parents what they think are the most important things a ten-year-old needs from his or her parents (besides the basics of food, shelter, and clothing), the lists that are generates are usually of this sort: Love, Understanding, Flexibility, Openness, Warmth, Humor, Open-mindedness, Ability to listen, Respect for the child's individuality, Taking an interest in what interests the child.

Surely this is a list to warm anyone's heart. But is this the whole story of effective parenting, of effective leadership as a parent? ...

What the list is missing is a child's need for parents who can exercise power on behalf of convictions, exert control, be righteously indignant, even express moral outrage (a virtue lauded by the Greeks and in woefully short supply at every level of modern American life). *Power, authority, control* are words that make people uncomfortable, especially in a context such as parenting, which is first of all about love. But perhaps effective parental loving of a ten-year-old must include competent executive functioning, a child's sure sense that someone is in charge who believes in something and will stand for those beliefs. [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 78-79]

14 Power, authority, and control make many of us uncomfortable, in part because we have seen so many arbitrary and abusive exercises of power (especially at the governmental and corporate levels) that we come to feel that all exercise of power must be intrinsically arbitrary or deleterious. [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, p. 80]

15 Authority is not mere power, and it is extremely unhelpful, even dangerous, to confuse the two. When people exert power over others, they compel them, forcefully. They apply the threat of privation or punishment so their subordinates have little choice but to act in a manner contrary to their personal needs, desires, and values. When people wield

authority, by contrast, they do so because of their competence—a competence that is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by others, and generally followed willingly, with a certain relief, and with the sense that justice is being served. ...

Now, power may accompany authority, and perhaps it must. However, and more important, *genuine authority constrains the arbitrary exercise of power*. This constraint manifests itself when the authoritative agent cares, and takes responsibility, for those over whom the exertion of power is possible. ... To adopt authority is to learn that power requires concern and competence—and that it comes at a genuine cost. ... [I]n the real world, those who occupy positions of authority in functional hierarchies are generally struck to the core by the responsibility they bear for the people they supervise, employ, and mentor. ...

The authority who remembers his or her sojourn as voluntary beginner ... can retain their identification with the newcomer and the promise of potential, and use that memory as the source of personal information necessary to constrain the hunger for power. [Jordan B. Peterson, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, Penguin / Portfolio, 2021, pp. 26-28]

16 Much of the ambivalence of adults toward "teen-agers" is, I should judge, simply a kind of repressed panic-response to the liquidation of authority over them. It must be understood, however, that the loss of authority is real; the adult empire is tottering. All empires are; this is the era of skepticism about the relationship between authority and status. It is an error, I believe, to interpret what is happening as a decline in respect for authority as such. American youngsters today are generous in according respect to parents, teachers, and other adults who earn it as individuals; and they are far more perceptive of individual quality in their elders than they could possibly have been when all adults were regarded as potentially or actually hostile and dangerous. But it is true that they are less likely to respect an adult today simply because he occupies a position of authority. [Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent*, 1959, Dell, 1970, p. 27]

17 [P]eople are especially shrinking from that awful and ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child. From this high

audacious duty the moderns are fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is, (of course) that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe. [G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 1910, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927, pp. 254-255, https://archive.org/details/whatswrongwithwo00ches/mode/2up]

18 Authority has been discarded by the adults, and this can mean only one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, p. 190]

19 [The crisis in education] can be schematically traced back to three basic assumptions, all of which are only too familiar. The first is that there exist a child's world and a society formed among children that are autonomous and must insofar as possible be left to them to govern. Adults are only there to help with this government. The authority that tells the individual child what to do and what not to do rests with the child group itself——and this produces, among other consequences, a situation in which the adult stands helpless before the individual child and out of contact with him. He can only tell him to do what he likes and then prevent the worst from happening. ...

As for the child in the group, he is of course rather worse off than before. ...

[B]y being emancipated from the authority of adults the child has not been freed but has been subjected to a much more terrifying and truly tyrannical authority, the tyranny of the majority. In any case the result is that the children have been so to speak banished from the world of grown-ups. They are either thrown back upon themselves or handed over to the tyranny of their own group, against which, because of its numerical superiority, they cannot rebel, with which, because they are children, they cannot reason, and out of which they cannot flee to any other world because the world of adults is barred to them. The reaction of the children to this pressure tends to be either conformism or juvenile delinquency, and is frequently a mixture of both. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, pp. 180-182]

20 The young are moved, bag and baggage, into areas where adults cannot help them, and it is a scary landscape they face, it is crowded with strange forms and faces, and if they return from it raddled, without balance and pitched toward excess, who can pretend to be surprised—or blameless? [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of

Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 809]

21 The chief and most damaging of the competing attachments that undermine parenting authority and parental love is the increasing bonding of our children with their peers. ... [T]he disorder affecting the generations of young children and adolescents now heading toward adulthood is rooted in the lost orientation of children toward the nurturing adults in their lives. ... For the first time in history young people are turning for instruction, modeling, and guidance not to mothers, fathers, teachers, and other responsible adults but to people whom nature never intended to place in a parenting role—their own peers. They are not manageable, teachable, or maturing because they no longer take their cues from adults. Instead, children are being brought up by immature persons who cannot possibly guide them to maturity. They are being brought up by each other. [Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*, 2004, Ballantine / Penguin Random House, 2024, p. 7]

22 Moreover, ... in recent decades [there has been] a most serious neglect of the training of teachers in their own subjects, especially in the public high schools. Since the teacher does not need to know his own subject, it not infrequently happens that he is just one hour ahead of his class in knowledge. This in turn means not only that the students are actually left to their own resources but that the most legitimate source of the teacher's authority as the person who, turn it whatever way one will, still knows more and can do more than oneself is no longer effective. Thus the non-authoritarian teacher, who would like to abstain from all methods of compulsion because he is able to rely on his own authority, can no longer exist. [Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 1961, Penguin, 1977, pp. 182-183]

23 We fail in [our] boundary-managing duties whenever we make children into adults (for example, by having them share the palpable or psychological burdens of our leadership) or make ourselves into children (for example, ... by not claiming our greater authority, competency, or entitlement to lead; or by suggesting we could operate as peerlike confidants of our children apart from our roles as their parents). [Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*, Harvard UP, 1994, pp. 80-81]

24 The family requires a certain authority and wisdom about the ways of the heavens and of men. The parents must have knowledge of what has happened in the past, and prescriptions for what ought to be, in order to resist the philistinism or the wickedness of the present. ...

Parents do not have the legal or moral authority they had in the Old World. They lack self-confidence as educators of their children ... [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon & Schuster, 1987, pp. 57-58]

25 All over the world the school has an anti-educational effect on society: school is recognized as the institution which specializes in education. ...

School appropriates the money, men, and good will available for education and in addition discourages other institutions from assuming educational tasks. Work, leisure, politics, city living, and even family life depend on schools for the habits and knowledge they presuppose, instead of becoming themselves the means of education. [Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Harper & Row, 1971, p. 11]

Related:
– What are the effects of coercion in education?
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– What is "reality of encounter" and why is it important in education?

22. Why is cultivating gratitude in education important?

1 The social world in which the child now lives is so rich and full that it is not easy to see how much it cost, how much effort and thought lie back of it. [John Dewey, *The School and Society*, 1899, U of Chicago P, 1932, pp. 156-157, https://archive.org/details/schoolsociety00dewerich]

2 What every man is born an heir to is an inheritance of human achievements; an inheritance of feelings, emotions, images, visions, thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, relationships, organizations, canons and maxims of conduct, procedures, rituals, skills, works of art, books, musical compositions, tools, artefacts and utensils ...

This world can be entered, possessed and enjoyed only in a process of learning ... and to initiate his pupils into it is the business of the teacher. [Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, Yale UP, 1989, p. 45]

3 A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving. [Albert Einstein, "The World As I See It," 1931, *Ideas and Opinions*, Three Rivers, 1982, p. 8]

4 All the advantages we enjoy in our present culture have been made possible by the efforts of people who have contributed. If individuals have not been cooperative, have not been interested in others, and have made no contribution to the whole, then their lives have been futile; they have disappeared from the face of the earth leaving no trace behind them. Only the work of those people who have contributed survives. Their spirit lives on, and their spirit is eternal. If we make this the basis for teaching our children, they will grow up with a natural liking for cooperative work. When they are confronted with difficulties, they will not weaken; they will be strong enough to face even the most difficult problems and solve them in a way that benefits everyone. [Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, 1931, Hazelden Foundation, 1998, pp. 191-192]

5 Unless we are the most ungrateful creatures in the world, we shall regard these noblest of men, the founders of divine schools of thought, as having been born for us, and having prepared life for us. We are led by the labour of others to behold the most beautiful things which have been brought out of darkness into light. We are not shut out from any period, we can make our way into every subject, and, if only we can summon up sufficient strength of mind to overstep the narrow limit of human weakness, we have a vast extent of time wherein to disport ourselves. [Lucius Annaeus Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life," ~49 AD, translated by Gareth D. Williams, https://archive.org/details/SenecaOnTheShortnessOfLife]

6 Both my grandparents did what they felt had to be done to survive. They did not expect of life the gift of personal fulfillment. They never had time or the security to think about fundamental changes in the conditions of their lives beyond their struggles to establish unions. They always felt that living with greater ease and developing one's self were gifts they would provide for their grandchildren through their work and love, and through the opportunities they gave their children. They were aware that it would take two generations of work to produce one generation who would have the time and security to grow without struggling for necessities. That was why grandchildren were so special for them. We were to be the first free children. And they weren't wrong in the case of my family. The fruit of their and my parents' labor was the leisure it afforded me to go to college, travel, and choose what to be, both professionally and as a person. When I was younger, I resented their inability to understand me. Now I often feel foolish for not understanding the gift they offered me. Perhaps part of that resentment came from my bewilderment at the freedom I had—the burden of being able to choose where to live, whom to become or to love, what to work at, and choose with no guidelines or tradition since my parents' and grandparents' worlds were not the same as mine. [Herbert Kohl, *The Herb Kohl Reader: Awakening the Heart of Teaching*, New Press, 2009, p. 197]

7 The science of government it is my duty to study, more than all other sciences; the arts of legislation and administration and negotiation ought to take the place of, indeed exclude, in a manner, all other arts. I must study politics and war, that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. Our sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain. [John Adams,

letter to Abigail Adams, 12 May 1780, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-03-02-0258]

8 Posterity! You will never know, how much it cost the present generation, to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make a good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in heaven, that I ever took half the pains to preserve it. [John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, 26 April 1777, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-02-02-0169]

9 The big question is how are we, as educators, going to handle the enormous increase in new life. How do we make available to these new students what we have been able to discover fairly accurately about the universe and the way it is operating? How are we going to be able to get them the true net value won blindly through the long tradition of ignorant dedications and hard-won lessons of all the unknown mothers and all the other invisibly heroic people who have given hopefully to the new life, such as, for instance, the fabulous heritage of men's stoic capacity to carry on despite immense hardships?

The new life needs to be inspired with the realization that it has all kinds of new advantages that have been gained through great dedications of unknown, unsung, heroes of intellectual exploration and great intuitively faithful integrities of men groping in the dark. Unless the new life is highly appreciative of those who have gone before, it won't be able to take effective advantage of its heritage. It will not be as regenerated and inspired as it might be if it appreciated the comprehensive love invested in that heritage. [Buckminster Fuller, *Education Automation*, Southern Illinois UP, 1962, pp. 33-34]

10 This transaction between the generations will ... be inhibited unless there is a contingent belief in the worth of what is to be mediated to the newcomer, and unless this conviction is somehow also transmitted. Everything human exists in terms of the recognition of its desirability, and this civilized inheritance, this world of meanings and understandings, will be transmitted only where it inspires the gratitude, the pride and even the veneration of those who already enjoy it, where it endows them with an identity they esteem, and where it is understood as a repeated summons rather than a possession, an engagement rather than an heirloom. [Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, Yale UP, 1989, pp. 66-67]

11 [G]ratitude is a window into purpose, because it helps us identify the things that we find particularly significant in our lives. When we express our thanks, we increase our awareness of what is most valuable in life, and we communicate this awareness to others around us. From gratitude springs not only an enhanced appreciation for our own blessings but also a desire to pass such blessings along to others—the heart and soul of purpose. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 141]

12 [B]y failing to reconnect their students to the idea that good fortune confers a responsibility to live generously toward the less fortunate, too many colleges are doing too little to help students cope with this siege of uncertainty. One of the insights at the core of the college idea—indeed of the idea of community itself—has always been that to serve others is to serve oneself by providing a sense of purpose, thereby countering the loneliness and aimlessness by which all people, young and old, can be afflicted. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 148]

13 Having the talent that enables us to succeed in reaping great market rewards, and living in a society at a time when there's great demand for the talents we happen to have, neither of those is one's own doing; both of those are matters of luck. ...

[In meritocratic societies] those who wind up on top come to believe that their success is their own doing. But this brings out the dark side of meritocracy, this attitude. It leads to what I call meritocratic hubris: the tendency of the successful to inhale too deeply of their success, to forget the luck and good fortune that helped them on their way, to forget their indebtedness to those who make their achievements possible: parents, teachers, coaches, family, neighborhoods, communities, countries, the times in which we live. [Michael Sandel, "The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Geneva Graduate Institute, 27 Sep. 2022, 31:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_rUeUM2HIQ]

14 "Ruling classes have always believed in their own right to rule, but it once was understood—at least by anyone who cared to think seriously about the matter—that their place in the social order was arbitrary, an accident of birth and breeding, rather than a matter of cosmic justice. Ideals of noblesse oblige grew from just this sense: the

knowledge that God (or blind chance) had given the elite much that was not necessarily deserved."

Today, however, "that knowledge has been wiped away. The modern elite's rule is regarded not as arbitrary but as just and right and true, at least if one follows the logic of meritocracy to its unspoken conclusion ... [today's elite] belong exactly where they are—the standardized tests and the college admissions officers have spoken, and their word is final." [Ross Douthat, *Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class*, Hyperion, 2005, pp. 12-13] ...

[F]ew people would deny that "the quasi-meritocratic admissions system of today is a major improvement over the more overtly discriminatory and hereditary system of the past." And yet [Jerome Karabel] concludes ... that "we neglect the dark side of our meritocracy at our collective peril." [*The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*, Houghton Mifflin, 2005, p. 557] [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, pp. 138-139]

15 A core element in a positive orientation is gratitude. ... This sense of gratitude for being able to partake in what the world has to offer, and to have a chance to make one's own contribution, was common among all in our highly purposeful group. ...

[T]his is the way that *all* young people should feel about life when they are starting out. Idealism, high hopes, enthusiasm, and a sense of awe and wonder in exploring the world around them are central to the traditional orientation of youth ... This is an attitudinal orientation that all young people deserve to have as their beginning stake in life. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 89-90]

16 One of the things that I find profoundly disquieting about the modern radical ideology that is so unfortunately dominant on campuses among young people is that it's unbelievably ungrateful. When I walk outside and there's not a riot and death in the streets, I'm having a good day. That's my sense of history. I'm constantly staggered by the fact that so much works *all the time*. ...

[F]or me, it's like Hobbes said: nasty, brutish, and short. The simplest and most likely social circumstance is catastrophe punctuated by hell, and to see that *not happening* in a sustained manner, constantly, and to see things improving around us, and to be reliable

> in that manner—and then not to be grateful for that, it's like, an unbelievable combination of ignorance and willful blindness. And it does no one's soul any good. It's so *good* to walk down the streets of a beautiful town like this and to be open-mouthed in non-ironic amazement at what's here. And to not instill that sense in young people—for them to understand that they are standing on the bones of generations of people who suffered to make this possible, despite all their errors, and brought this forward ... [Jordan B. Peterson, "Apprehending the Transcendent," *YouTube*, uploaded by Jordan B. Peterson, 14 Dec. 2018, 1:20:40, https://youtu.be/XvbtKAYdcZY?si=31P-pgB5F5p63aPX]

17 > Of course, culture is an oppressive structure. It's always been that way. ... What we inherit from the past is willfully blind, and out of date. It's a ghost, a machine, and a monster. It must be rescued, repaired and kept at bay by the attention and effort of the living. It crushes, as it hammers us into socially acceptable shape, and it wastes great potential. But it offers great gain, too. Every word we speak is a gift from our ancestors. Every thought we think was thought previously by someone smarter. The highly functional infrastructure that surrounds us, particularly in the West, is a gift from our ancestors: the comparatively uncorrupt political and economic systems, the technology, the wealth, the lifespan, the freedom, the luxury, and the opportunity. Culture takes with one hand, but in some fortunate places it gives more with the other. To think about culture only as oppressive is ignorant and ungrateful, as well as dangerous. [Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House Canada, 2018, pp. 302-303]

Related:
– How or why should we incorporate the spiritual, sacred, or transcendent in education?
– What is the proper function of the university?

23. How or why should we incorporate the spiritual, sacred, or transcendent in education?

1 Children will not thrive psychologically until they learn to dedicate themselves to purposes that go beyond their own egoistic desires. They will not thrive unless they have acquired a living sense of what some religious traditions have called transcendence: a faith in, and devotion to, concerns that are considered larger than the self. In a child's world, the clearest example of this is a sense of service to others. But it also may include beliefs about profound matters such as the meaning and purpose of life.

A sense of transcendence, an orientation of service to others, an intimation of life's deeper meaning are all elements of the capacities that I refer to when I write of children's need for spirituality. The notion of spiritual needs has not been a fashionable one in scientific or professional circles, in part because of its connections with religiosity. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 81]

2 In a literal sense, the most dispiriting result of our myths about children is that we withhold spiritual messages from them. Our reticence springs from the myth of childhood incompetence. ... We do not trust the child's intelligence or attention span enough to engage the child in serious consideration of transcendent values. We refrain from communicating other people's high ideals to them—or when we do, feel almost apologetic about it. In fact, children are fascinated by the timeless enigmas of life and death, are not at all threatened by talk of them, and are eager to be drawn into discussion about them. ... [C]hildren are openly receptive to spiritual ideas and long for transcendent truths that can nourish their sense of purpose and provide them with a moral mission in life. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 25]

3 The low esteem in which teachers have been traditionally held in the United States continues today, and low esteem is usually accompanied by low pay. It is further suggested that the reason for the disdain of teachers is the detachment of American education from the "sacred", i.e. the lack of any deeply felt social consciousness of the

aims of education. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, p. 120]

4 When one considers in its length and in its breadth the importance of this question of the education of a nation's young, the broken lives, the defeated hopes, the national failures, which result from the frivolous inertia with which it is treated, it is difficult to restrain within oneself a savage rage. ...

We can be content with no less than the old summary of educational ideal which has been current at any time from the dawn of our civilization. The essence of education is that it be religious.

Pray, what is religious education?

A religious education is an education which inculcates duty and reverence. Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events. Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays,* Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 22-23]

5 Those who use the term "religious" without any supernatural or doctrinal connotations, like John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead in some of their writings, do not call for the introduction of religion as a specific subject of instruction in the curriculum. To them a truly religious education has an entirely different meaning. It is found wherever knowledge is so taught that it heightens the sense of human responsibility for the inescapable decisions which men must make. "Religious" here is synonymous with "moral" in its broadest sense. It is a pervasive feeling and attitude nurtured by the whole educational enterprise when, freed from superstition, it devotes itself to truth in the service of man. It is a form of natural piety not merely towards existence but to the ideal possibilities of a better existence. [Sidney Hook, *Education for Modern Man: A New Perspective*, 1963, Wipf and Stock, 2019, pp. 159-160]

6 [There are] three incredibly important things that give meaning to life, each of which that has been more or less trashed by our current civilization.

The first is our relationship with society, our being bound to one another … the business of sharing one's life with people who share your values, whom you can trust, whom you can confide in, whom you can eat with, play with, and generally share a culture … [with] common rituals that we all understand. That is one thing, and it is extremely difficult to find any such coherence in modern society. …

The second is our relationship with the natural world, in all its complexity and beauty. For most people, until very recently, it was almost impossible for their lives not to be enmeshed with the surrounding natural world. Only in the last, perhaps, 150 years or so have we become isolated from nature. And this is a really important divorce. …

And the third is a relationship to something beyond *this* … it is the transcendent realm, or the realm of the spiritual or the sacred. A lot of people now they've been trained to think that this is a rather negligible issue, that it really is a kind of vestige of something that hangs over from a primitive time when people weren't properly educated and they invented superstitions to try and explain life. That is such a terrible diminution and travesty. [Ian McGilchrist, "The Psychological Drivers of the Metacrisis," *YouTube*, uploaded by Dr. Iain McGilchrist, 19 Dec. 2023, 1:03:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uA5GV-XmwtM]

7 By soul, what Keats meant *is* our earthly self, understood in its totality—moral, intellectual, sensual, emotional, our whole being. And by calling the world a vale of soul-making, he meant that experience itself is the crucible of its creation. …

I've been using the word *soul*, and though I'm not religious, I find that only religious language has sufficient gravity to do [the questions of education] justice. For we are speaking of the most important thing: no less a thing than how to live. We might propose, then, that you should arrive at college as at the beginning of a pilgrimage—a movement toward the truth and toward the self. That you should come to seek conversion, though you know not yet to what belief or way. That you should approach ideas as instruments of salvation, driven by a need to work things through for yourself, so that you won't be damned to go through life at second hand, thinking other people's thoughts and dreaming other people's dreams. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 85-86]

8 [College students] might say, "Well I'm doing this practically, because I need a degree to get a job." Which ... is perfectly reasonable. ... [I]t's a good fragmentary ambition. But their core is dying for something deeper than that. And they're coming to university the way that you enter a cathedral properly—*if* you enter it properly—they come *prayerfully*. They're hoping—but they won't talk to anyone about it—they're hoping: "God, I hope that what I need is here." And if you provide that, then they're just overwhelmed by it. And then they're motivated to work and to move and to put themselves together. [Jordan B. Peterson, "Higher Ed and Our Cultural Inflection Point," *YouTube*, uploaded by Jordan B. Peterson, 21 Feb. 2019, 1:21:05, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlgG8C1GydA]

9 The cultural technique of deep attention emerged precisely out of ritual and religious practices. It is no accident that "religion" is derived from *relegere*: to take note. Every religious practice is an exercise in attention. A temple is a place of the highest degree of attention. According to Malebranche, attention is the natural prayer of the soul. Today, the soul does not pray. [Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, translated by Danial Steuer, 2019, Polity Press, 2020, pp. 5-7]

10 Attention is the most profound source of meaning that we can have. ... The granularity, the particularity, the pleasure of the world depends on slowing down and looking harder. [Richard Powers, "Meet Pulitzer Prize-Winning Stanford Professor," *YouTube*, uploaded by David Perell, 9 Oct. 2024, 1:14:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUDlpMN-f5w]

11 The goal of education, according to Nietzsche, is "noble culture." ... that is, making yourself capable of deep and contemplative attention, casting a long and slow gaze. [This] represents the "*first* preliminary schooling for spirituality." One must learn "*not* to react immediately to a stimulus, but instead to take control of the inhibiting, excluding instincts." By the same token, "every characteristic absence of spirituality, every piece of common vulgarity, is due to an inability to resist a stimulus"—the inability to set a *no* in opposition. ... [The *contemplative life*] offers resistance to crowding, intrusive stimuli. Instead of surrendering the gaze to external impulses, it steers them in sovereign fashion. [Byun-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, translated by Erik Butler, 2010, Stanford UP, 2015, p. 21]

12 [F]ocus is not some peripheral aspect of life, nor is it simply a tool to become more productive at work. It is part of the lens through which the whole of reality is interpreted. To lose the ability to focus is to limit the ways in which we can experience the world. … [Focus] is an overarching skill that enhances almost every aspect of our existence … [W]hen we come to teach the next generation about what makes a fulfilling life, we [should] include focus among its most central pillars.

The word "focus" originally comes from the Latin term for a hearth or a fireplace. And maybe this best sums up what I would like for a new conception of focus: Something at the heart of the dwelling of life, that brings light and warmth when aflame, and when lying unlit and untended, leaves us cold, dims our illumination, and will not revive itself until we actively decide to spark it again. Something that requires fuel and care, and can grow from a small flicker to a glorious roaring blaze, if we decide to make it a focal point of our value system. [Joe Folley, "How Distraction Will Destroy Your Life," *YouTube*, uploaded by Unsolicited Advice, 19 Apr. 2025, 1:09:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxJkj-C4vjs]

13 Ritual and ceremony are now often said to be necessary for the family, and they are now lacking. The family, however, has to be a sacred unity believing in the permanence of what it teaches, if its ritual and ceremony are to express and transmit the wonder of the moral law, which it alone is capable of transmitting and which makes it special in a world devoted to the humanly, all too humanly, useful. [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon & Schuster, 1987, pp. 57-58]

14 Ritual can be defined as the structured repetition of important concepts, made resonant through the help of formal pageantry and ceremony. Ritual takes thoughts that are known but unattended and renders them active and vivid once more in our distracted minds. Unlike standard modern education, ritual doesn't aim to teach us anything new; it wants to lend compelling form to what we believe we already know. It wants to turn our theoretical allegiances into habits. …

[T]he best rituals don't so much impose upon us ideas that we are opposed to but take us back to ideas that we are in deep agreement with yet have allowed to lapse: They are an externally mandated route to inner authenticity.

In the course of secularizing our societies, we may have been too hasty in doing away with rituals. An education system alive to the wisdom of religions would perceive the role of structured lessons that constantly repeat what we know full well already, and yet so arduously and grievously forget. A good "school" shouldn't tell us only things we've never heard of before; it should be deeply interested in rehearsing all that is theoretically known yet practically forgotten. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, pp. 14-15]

15 We can define rituals as *symbolic techniques of making oneself at home in the world*. They transform being-in-the-world into *being-at-home*. They turn the world into a reliable place. ...

Through their *self-sameness*, their *repetitiveness*, [rituals] stabilize life. ... Relentless consumption surrounds us with disappearance, thus destabilizing life. Ritual practices ensure that we treat not only other people but also things in beautiful ways ...

[In the modern world,] perception is never at rest: it has lost the capacity to linger. ...

Rituals are characterized by repetition. ...

Chasing new stimuli, excitement and experience, we lose the capacity for repetition. [Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, translated by Danial Steuer, 2019, Polity Press, 2020, pp. 2-8]

16 The humanities—history, philosophy, religious studies, above all, literature and the other arts—are the record of the ways that people have come to terms with being human. They address the questions that are proper to us ... questions of love, death, family, morality, time, truth, God, and everything else within the wide, starred universe of human experience.

The humanities are what we have, in a secular society, instead of religion. ... As traditional beliefs were broken down across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ... the arts emerged as the place where educated people went to contemplate those questions of meaning and value and purpose. ... Libraries, museums, and theaters became the new churches, places where you came to court the old emotions of catharsis, transcendence, redemption, and joy. ... "The priest departs," said Whitman, "the divine literatus comes." *A Portrait of the Artist* dramatizes this precise transition. Instead of

joining the Catholic clergy ... Stephen chooses to devote himself to performing the miracle of literature, "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life"—that is, into the imperishable stuff of art. ...

But why art? What claim does art have on the truth? ... [And] how do artists manage it? By looking very hard and long, then working very hard and long to tell us what they saw. ...

"[T]he greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, —all in one." [John Ruskin]

Our eyes slide over the world, as we obsess about our grades or our sex life or our income. Our minds slide over it. Art, to paraphrase the poet Shelley, bursts the spirit's sleep. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 155-158]

17 The cause of this decay of the family's traditional role as the transmitter of tradition is the same as that of the decay of the humanities: nobody believes that the old books do, or even could, contain the truth. ... In the United States, practically speaking, the Bible was the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and—as the very model for a vision of the order of the whole of things, as well as the key to the rest of Western art, the greatest works of which were in one way or another responsive to the Bible—provided access to the seriousness of books. With its gradual and inevitable disappearance, the very idea of such a total book and the possibility and necessity of world-explanation is disappearing. [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon & Schuster, 1987, p. 58]

18 The moral education that is today supposed to be the great responsibility of the family cannot exist if it cannot present to the imagination of the young a vision of a moral cosmos and of the rewards and punishments for good and evil, sublime speeches that accompany and interpret deeds, protagonists and antagonists in the drama of moral choice, a sense of the stakes involved in such choice, and the despair that results when the world is "disenchanted." Otherwise, education becomes the vain attempt to give

children "values." [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon & Schuster, 1987, pp. 60-61]

19 The curse that has been laid on humanity, in fable and in fact, is, that by the sweat of its brow shall it live. But reason and moral intuition have seen in this curse the foundation for advance. The early Benedictine monks rejoiced in their labours because they conceived themselves as thereby made fellow-workers with Christ.

Stripped of its theological trappings, the essential idea remains, that work should be transfused with intellectual and moral vision and thereby turned into a joy, triumphing over its weariness and its pain. Each of us will re-state this abstract formulation in a more concrete shape in accordance with his private outlook. ... However you phrase it, it remains the sole real hope of toiling humanity; and it is in the hands of technical teachers, and of those who control their spheres of activity, so to mould the nation that daily it may pass to its labours in the spirit of the monks of old. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 67-68]

20 The task for education, and the meaning of freedom in the new society, should now be even more clear. Education would teach the individual how "the world-life would miss his deed." Nothing less. ...

We must also answer the question ... "How do I develop my own personal and unique powers to their fullest?" ...

How better to awaken the interests of broad masses of students than by making their own life and freedom the stake of their education? Their own lives become their "intellectual positions," to expand and defend, to sally out from in search of richer and richer nourishment. How better to expand the base of "scholarship" and "expertise" than by making life itself the problem frame of knowledge, by giving to each the task of throwing light on his own liberation, of weighing and choosing from accumulated wisdom for the purposes of his own soul? [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 216-219, 233-234]

21 [A]n education which *intensifies awareness* ... is what an Existentialist would strive for. ...

Intensity of awareness is not to be thought of as a kind of abstract, general principle. It is always personal. ... It refers to [a person's] awareness of himself and of the necessity for him to decide how he wants to live his own life, his awareness of the need to decide which values he wants to live by. In practical terms, it refers to his awareness of his own precarious role as a baseless chooser who cannot escape choosing, and therefore creating, his own personal answer to all normative and moral questions that come up in his classroom or in his experience outside of school.

A youngster who becomes fully aware of himself as the shaper of his own life, aware of the fact that he must take charge of that life and make it his own statement of what a human being *ought* to be—this is the individual who has been brought beyond mere intellectual discipline, beyond mere subject matter, beyond mere enculturation ... [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, p. 111]

22 Never regard your study as a duty, but as the enviable opportunity to learn the liberating influence of beauty for your own personal joy and for the profit of the community to which your later work will belong. [Albert Einstein, *The Expanded Quotable Einstein*, edited by Alice Calaprice, Princeton UP, 2000, p. 68]

23 Fidelity, [Erik Erikson] defines as "the strength of disciplined devotion. It is gained in the involvement of youth in such experiences as reveal the essence of the era they are to join—as the beneficiaries of its tradition, as the practitioners and innovators of its technology, as renewers of its ethical strength, as rebels bent on the destruction of the outlived, and as deviants with deviant commitments." ["Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," 1960] [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage / Random House, 1965, pp. 10-11]

24 Through all this chaos, then we come back once more to our main conclusion. The true task of culture today is not a task of expansion, but very decidedly of selection—and rejection. The educationist must find a creed and teach it. Even if it be not a theological creed, it must still be as fastidious and as firm as theology. In short, it must be orthodox. ... Out of all this throng of theories it must somehow select a theory; out of all these

> thundering voices it must manage to hear a voice; out of all this awful and aching battle of blinding lights, without one shadow to give shape to them, it must manage somehow to trace and to track a star. [G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World*, 1910, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1927, pp. 275-276, https://archive.org/details/whatswrongwithwo00ches/mode/2up]

Related:
– Why is cultivating gratitude in education important?
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?

24. Why is cultivating individuality in education important?

1 [S]ameness is the enemy not only of vitality but of excellence, for where there are few or no differences—in genetic structure, in language, in art—it is not possible to develop robust standards of excellence. ...

[Diversity] is an argument for the growth and malleability of standards, a growth that takes place across time and space and that is given form by differences of gender, religion, and all the other categories of humanity.

Thus, the story of how language, art, politics, science, and most expressions of human activity have grown, been vitalized and enriched through the intermingling of different ideas is one way to organize learning and to provide the young with a sense of pride in being human. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 79-80]

2 We need open, free, and adaptable people precisely because we need unique perceptions of the real, new insights into it so as to *disclose more of it*. ... The genius of the theoreticians of democracy is that they understood this, that we must have as many different individuals as possible so as to have as varied a view of reality as possible, for only in this way can we get a rich approximation of it. ... As the great Carlyle warned us, *everybody* has to think and see for himself, or the nations are doomed. [Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*, Free Press, 1971, p. 163-164]

3 [N]either the whole of truth, nor the whole of good, is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands. ... It is enough to ask of each of us that he should be faithful to his own opportunities and make the most of his own blessings, without presuming to regulate the rest of the vast field. [William James, "Talks to Students: On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," 1892, *William James: Writings 1878-1899*, Literary Classics of the United States, 1992, p. 860]

4 As [William] James said, each person sums up a whole range of very personal experiences so that his life is a very unique problem needing very individual kinds of solutions. Kierkegaard had said that same thing when he answered those who objected to his life style: he said it was singular because it was the one singularly designed to be what he needed to live; it is as simple and as final as that. [Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 1973, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 259]

5 Positive freedom as the realization of the self implies the full affirmation of the uniqueness of the individual. Men are born equal but they are also born different. The basis of this difference is the inherited equipment, physiological and mental, with which they start life, to which is added the particular constellation of circumstances and experiences that they meet with. ... Organic growth is possible only under the condition of supreme respect for the peculiarity of the self of other persons as well as of our own self. This respect for and cultivation of the uniqueness of the self is the most valuable achievement of human culture and it is this very achievement that is in danger today. [Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941, Henry Holt & Co., 1994, pp. 262-263]

6 The development of individual variety tends to be both the cause and the effect of the progress of civilization. ... [I]t is the variety of individual interests and talents that permits the growth of specialization and division of labor, on which civilized economies depend. [Murray Rothbard, *Education: Free and Compulsory*, 1971, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1999, p. 5]

7 Mankind is naturally differentiated into many types, and to press all these types into the same mold must inevitably lead to distortions and repressions. Schools should be of many kinds, following different methods and catering to different dispositions. ... [D]ifferentiation is an organic process, the spontaneous and roving association of individuals for particular purposes. ... The whole structure of education, as the natural process we have envisaged, falls to pieces if we attempt to make that structure rational or artificial. Like life itself, animal as well as human, education must follow a principle of organic consistency: we must *feel our way* to the right units, and out of the natural grouping of these units round the biological actualities and practical activities of man, free and healthy institutions will emerge. Among these we shall find institutions in which children can mature the principle of growth innate in each one of them while at the same time they are initiated into the fellowship of their familiars. [Herbert Read,

Education for Peace, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, pp. 146-147, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

8 As practiced now, test scores reflect the effectiveness of a teacher, a school, or an educational system in producing a homogenous population of students in the tested subjects. They say little about a teacher, school, or system's capacity in fostering a diversity of talents. But research has shown that diverse talents, skills, knowledge, and perspectives are powerful assets to create better societies, groups and businesses (Page, 2007). Moreover, as technology and globalization drastically transformed our world from a mass-production industrial society into a society that is more personal, customizable, and hyperspecialized, traditional undervalued talents become highly valuable (Pink, 2005). Thus, a world-class education may be one that enhances diversity rather than reduces it. [Yong Zhao, "The Danger of Misguiding Outcomes: Lessons From Easter Island," *Counting What Counts: Reframing Education Outcomes*, edited by Yong Zhao, Solution Tree, 2016, p. 5]

9 The advantages of unlimited development of private schools is that there will tend to be developed on the free market a different type of school for each type of demand. ... The State's imposition of uniform standards does grave violation to the diversity of human tastes and abilities. [Murray Rothbard, *Education: Free and Compulsory*, 1971, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1999, p. 9]

10 [I]t is important to realize that the very *nature* of the public school *requires* the imposition of uniformity and the stamping out of diversity and individuality in education.

For it is in the nature of any governmental bureaucracy to live by a set of rules, and to impose those rules in a uniform and heavy-handed manner. If it did not do so, and the bureaucrat were to decide individual cases ad hoc, he would then be accused, and properly so, of not treating each taxpayer and citizen in an equal and uniform manner. ...

The public school bureaucrat, for his part, is faced with a host of crucial and controversial decisions in deciding on the pattern of formal schooling in his area. He must decide: Should schooling be—traditional or progressive? free enterprise or socialistic? competitive or egalitarian? liberal arts or vocational? ... sex education or not?

religious or secular? or various shades between these poles. The point is that *whatever* he decides, and even if he decides according to the wishes of the majority of the public, there will always be a substantial number of parents and children who will be totally deprived of the kind of education they desire. ... The more that education becomes public, the more will heavyhanded uniformity stamp out the needs and desires of individuals and minorities. [Murray Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 1973, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006, pp. 154-156]

11 [A] community of standardized individuals without personal originality and personal aims would be a poor community without possibilities for development. [Albert Einstein, "On Education," 1936, *Ideas and Opinions*, Three Rivers, 1982, p. 60]

12 Another merit of [the home in education] is that it preserves the diversity between individuals. ... Too much difference is a barrier to social solidarity, but some difference is essential to the best form of co-operation. ... Social co-operation, in like manner, requires differences of taste and aptitude, which are less likely to exist if all children are exposed to exactly the same influences than if parental differences are allowed to affect them. This is to my mind an important argument against the Platonic doctrine that children should be wholly reared by the State. [Bertrand Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, 1932, Routledge Classics, 2009, pp. 45-46]

13 Equalizing opportunity through universal higher education subjects the whole population to the intellectual mode natural only to a few. It violates the fundamental egalitarian principle of respect for the differences between people. [Caroline Bird, "College is a Waste of Time and Money," *The Case Against College*, David McKay Co., 1975, https://www.scribd.com/document/46775622/Caroline-Bird-College-is-a-Waste-of-Time-and-Money]

14 I believe that it is an increasingly common pattern in our culture for each one of us to believe, "Every other person must feel and think and believe the same as I do." We find it very hard to permit our children or our parents or our spouses to feel differently than we do about particular issues or problems. We cannot permit our clients or our students to differ from us or to utilize their experience in their own individual ways. On a national scale, we cannot permit another nation to think or feel differently than we do. Yet it has come to seem to me that this separateness of individuals, the right of each individual to

utilize his experience in his own way and to discover his own meanings in it,—this is one of the most priceless potentialities of life. Each person is an island unto himself, in a very real sense; and he can only build bridges to other islands if he is first of all willing to be himself and permitted to be himself. So I find that when I can accept another person, which means specifically accepting the feelings and attitudes and beliefs that he has as a real and vital part of him, then I am assisting him to become a person: and there seems to me great value in this. [Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 21]

15 The purpose of [liberal education] is not to make self-destructive or social-destructive demons, but just the opposite: to help bring about necessary and continuing social changes by truly strong and responsible people. We would try to liberate maximum individuality only because we know that this is the best way to master the new and unexpected problems that arise in each generation. We free our youth because we trust that they will not repeat our fatal mistakes. [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 38-39]

16 Liberty is not simply a proposition designed to placate intellectuals who want to protect the expression of their opinions. It is, rather, the condition in which individuals—and the societies in which they live—can remain resilient, adaptive to changing conditions, and thus maintain the creative impulses necessary for their vibrancy.

The *individual*, with his or her uniqueness and self-directed nature, is the expression of life on this planet. As such, a condition of liberty tends to generate variation and non-uniformity, with social order arising as the unintended consequence of individuals pursuing their varied self-interests. ...

But most institutions tend to be uncomfortable with liberty, for the processes of change that are implicit therein run counter to their purposes of a structured permanency. Because of their size and scope of operation, institutions deal with people on a *mass*, rather than *individualized*, basis. As our world becomes more institutionalized, standardization and uniformity become more dominant values. [Buttler Shaffer, *The Wizards of Ozymandias: Reflections on the Decline & Fall*, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2012, pp. 2-6]

Related:

– What constitutes a successful adolescence?

– Why do the questions of education, and a purposeful life, demand individual attention?

25. What is "reality of encounter" and why is it important in education?

1 Perhaps the most basic of these attitudes [which facilitate learning] is realness or genuineness. When the facilitator is a real person, being what he is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or a facade, he is much more likely to be effective. This means that the feelings which he is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, that he is able to live these feelings, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate. It means that he comes into a direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting him on a person-to-person basis. It means that he is *being* himself, not denying himself. ...

Thus, [the teacher] is a person to his students, not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement nor a sterile tube through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next.

It is obvious that this attitudinal set, found to be effective in psychotherapy, is sharply in contrast with the tendency of most teachers to show themselves to their pupils simply as roles. It is quite customary for teachers rather consciously to put on the mask, the role, the facade, of being a teacher, and to wear this facade all day removing it only when they have left the school at night. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, pp. 106-107]

2 [George Dennison] rightly said that one reason why schooling is so seldom helpful to children, and almost always deeply harmful, is that they have no reality of encounter with their teachers. The teachers are not themselves, but players of roles. They do not talk about what is real to them, what they know, are interested in, and love, but about what the curriculum, the teachers' manual, and the lesson plan says they must talk about. "Start a discussion about..." They do not respond naturally and honestly to the acts and needs of the children, but only as the rules tell them to respond. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 23-24]

3 Apart from family, children have little speech with any adults except schoolteachers. But the crowding and scheduling in school allow little chance or time for personal conduct.

Also, increasingly in grade schools as well as in colleges, the teachers have abdicated their personal role to specialist counsellors and administrators, so that confiding and guidance tend to occur only in extreme situations. One must be "deviant" to be attended to as a human being. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 66]

4 For all the skill that teaching involves, you ultimately only have a single tool: your entire life as you have lived it up until the moment you walk into class. "The teacher, that professional amateur," said the critic Leslie Fiedler, "teaches not so much his subject as himself." ... It's not that I needed my teachers to be confessional; I just needed them to be *present*. ...

Students want you to be honest, not least about yourself. They want you to *be* yourself. You need to step outside the role a bit, regard it with a little irony, if only to acknowledge the dissonance between the institution and the spirit. It often feels that there are certain things you cannot say inside the classroom—the most serious things that you want to say, the most genuine things. You want to say that life is tragic, that we are dangling above a void, that what's at stake, when you read a book, is nothing less than life itself. But you feel your institutional surroundings holding you as if between quotation marks. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 179-180]

5 There is no such thing as learning except (as Dewey tells us) in the continuum of experience. But this continuum cannot survive in the classroom unless there is reality of encounter between the adults and the children. The teachers must be themselves, and not play roles. They must teach the children, and not teach "subjects." The child, after all, is avid to acquire what he takes to be the necessities of life, and the teacher must not answer him with mere professionalism and gimmickry. The continuum of experience and reality of encounter are destroyed in the public schools (and most private ones) by the very methods which form the institution itself—the top-down organization, the regimentation, the faceless encounters, the empty professionalism, and so on. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 73-74]

6 [W]e need to understand what the process of rewarding does to the interaction between giver and receiver. Someone who is raising or teaching children, for example, probably wants to create a caring alliance with each child, to help him or her feel safe enough to ask for help when problems develop. This is very possibly the single most fundamental requirement for helping a child to grow up healthy and develop a set of good values. For academic reasons, too, an adult must nurture just such a relationship with a student if there is to be any hope of the student's admitting mistakes freely and accepting guidance. ...

This is precisely what rewards and punishments kill. If your parent or teacher or manager is sitting in judgment of what you do, and if that judgment will determine whether good things or bad things happen to you, this cannot help but warp your relationship with that person. You will not be working collaboratively in order to learn or grow; you will be trying to get him or her to approve of what you are doing so you can get the goodies. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 57]

7 My own demands ... were an important part of Jose's experience. They were not simply the demands of a teacher, nor of an adult, but belonged to my own way of caring about Jose. And he sensed this. There was something he prized in the fact that I made demands on him. This became all the more evident once he realized that I wasn't simply processing him, that is, grading, measuring etc. And when he learned that he *could* refuse—could refuse altogether, could terminate the lesson, could change its direction, could insist on something else—our mutual interest in his development was taken quite for granted. We became collaborators in the business of life.

Obviously, if I had tried to compel him, none of this would have been possible. And if I had made no demand—had simply waited for him to come to class—I would in some sense have been false to my own motives, my own engagement in the life of the school and the community. In his eyes I would have lost immediacy, would have lost reality, as it were, for I would have seemed more and more like *just* a teacher. What he prized after all was this: that an adult, with a life of his own, was willing to teach him.

How odd it is to have to say this! What a vast perversion of the natural relations of children and adults has been worked by our bureaucratized system of public education? It was important to Jose that I was not just a teacher, but a writer as well, that I was interested in painting and had friends who were artists, that I took part in civil rights

demonstrations. To the extent that he sensed my life stretching out beyond him into (for him) the unknown, my meaning as an adult was enhanced, and the things I already knew and might teach him gained the luster they really possess in life. This is true for every teacher, every student. No teacher is just a teacher, no student just a student. The life meaning which joins them is the *sine qua non* for the process of education, yet precisely this is destroyed in the public schools because everything is standardized and the persons are made to vanish into their roles. This is exactly Sartre's definition of inauthenticity. I am reminded here, too, of how often John Dewey and, in our own time, Paul Goodman and Elliott Shapiro have urged the direct use of the community. The world *as it exists* is what the young are hungry for; and we give them road maps, mere diagrams of the world at a distance. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 112-114]

8 [Maxine] needed to know exactly where the power lay. It was as if she were asking herself on what terms she could be part of a group, on what terms have her personal wishes gratified. What good thing might be offered her in return for giving up her infantile desires? She wanted to know, too, which aspects of her teachers' behavior constituted the true authority of adult life. ...

How did Maxine ask this dualistic question? She asked it by stealing Dodie's soda pop, and by shouting some loud irrelevancy when Rudella was trying to question her teacher, and by taking all the magnets from the other children and kicking her teacher in the shins, and by grabbing Elena's cookies at lunchtime. And what answers did she receive? But let me describe the public-school answers first, for she had done the very same things in the public school. She had stolen someone's cookies, but it was the teacher who responded, not the victim; and so Maxine could not find out the meaning of her action among her peers. Nor could that long and subtle chain of children's reactions—with all their surprising turns of patience and generosity—even begin to take shape. And when Maxine confronted the teacher directly, shouting in class and drowning her out she was punished in some routine way and was again deprived of the individual relational response which would have meant much to her. Yet she kept pressing on, creating crisis after crisis, always insisting upon relation. ... [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 203-208]

9 [M]odern education systems are cluttered with every sort of distraction. There are political agendas, national priorities, union bargaining positions, building codes, job

descriptions, parental ambitions, peer pressures. The list goes on. But the heart of education is the relationship between the student and the teacher. Everything else depends on how productive and successful that relationship is. If that is not working, then the system is not working. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, p. 71]

10 If any single fact has been established by psychotherapy research, it is that a positive relationship between patient and therapist is positively related to the therapy outcome. Effective therapists respond to their patients in a genuine manner; they establish a relationship that a patient perceives as safe and accepting; they display a nonpossessive warmth and a high degree of accurate empathy and are able to "be with" or "grasp the meaning" of the patient. [Irvin Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, Basic Books, 1980, p. 401]

11 In a recent study of cognitive behavioral therapy, perceived therapist genuineness was found to be the single most important predictor of the therapeutic alliance, and authenticity has been identified as an important component of mentoring. [E. Jung et al., 2015; M. Larsson et al., 2016; R. Spencer, 2006] Thus, a key step in establishing an alliance with youth is to convey a sense of being authentically engaged and invested. [M. J. Karcher, C. Herrera, and K. Hansen, 2010; S. D. McQuillin et al., 2019] [Jean E. Rhodes, *Older and Wiser: New Ideas for Youth Mentoring in the 21st Century*, Harvard UP, 2020, p. 115]

12 To an existential therapist, when "technique" is made paramount, everything is lost because the very essence of the authentic relationship is that one does not manipulate but turns toward another with one's whole being.

Many therapists have difficulty relating authentically to patients because of presuppositions and stereotypes. The training of therapists emphasizes diagnosis and classification; they are taught to objectify patients, to arrive at an APA (American Psychiatric Association) code number that pins a patient like a specimen to an admission work-up or an insurance form. And, indeed, no responsible therapist can deny there is a place for diagnostic evaluation. ...

Too often diagnostic categorization is a stimulating intellectual exercise whose sole function is to provide the therapist with a sense of order and mastery. The major task of

the maturing therapist is to learn to tolerate uncertainty. What is required is a major shift in perspective: rather than strive to order the interview "material" into an intellectually coherent framework, the therapist must strive toward authentic engagement. [Irvin Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, Basic Books, 1980, p. 409-411]

13 We have encouraged parents to represent themselves as they really are and not feel obligated to build themselves up in the child's eyes. Parental honesty to some extent prevents the child's idealizing the parents and family to the child's detriment. Similarly, we have suggested to parents that they perceive their children realistically and not build *them* up falsely. ...

It is vital that parents not mislead their children about their positive or negative feelings. Many books on child rearing do an untold amount of damage because they promote duplicity; they teach parents to act the "proper" responses rather than express their genuine feeling. Ideally, parents would not distort their child's perception of reality with double messages and reassurances of love at times when the parents are in fact feeling hostile or angry toward him. Similarly, they would not shelter their offspring from the reality of death or illness with false beliefs and the denial of basic existential issues. Instead they would share the happiness and pain of life with their children on a level appropriate to each child's age. [Robert Firestone, *The Fantasy Bond: Structure of Psychological Defenses*, 1985, The Glendon Association, 1987, pp. 383-384]

14 Especially important for the nurturing of a child's self-esteem is the experience of what I have called *psychological visibility*. ...

If I say or do something and you respond in a way that I perceive as congruent in terms of my own behavior ... I feel seen and understood by you. I feel visible. In contrast, if I say or do something and you respond in a way that makes no sense to me in terms of my own behavior ... I do not feel seen and understood, I feel invisible. ...

A child has a natural desire to be seen, heard, understood, and responded to appropriately. To a self that is still forming, this need is particularly urgent. This is one of the reasons a child will look to a parent for a response after taking some action. A child who experiences his or her excitement as good, as a value, but is punished or rebuked for it by adults undergoes a bewildering experience of invisibility and

distortion. A child who is praised for "always being an angel" and knows this is not true also experiences invisibility and disorientation. ...

If we are to love effectively—whether the object is our child, our mate, or a friend—the ability to provide the experience of visibility is essential. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 179-182]

15 There is perhaps nothing more important to know about children than that they need to make sense out of their experience. In effect, they need to know that the universe is rational—and that human existence is knowable, predictable, and stable. On that foundation, they can build a sense of efficacy; without it, the task is worse than difficult. ...

"[S]anity" in family life is one of a child's most urgent needs if healthy development is to be possible.

What does *sanity* mean in this context? It means adults who, for the most part, say what they mean and mean what they say. It means rules that are understandable, consistent, and fair. ... It means being brought up by parents whose emotional life is more or less graspable and predictable ... It means a home in which reality is appropriately acknowledged ... It means parents who practice what they preach. Who are willing to admit when they make mistakes and apologize when they know they have been unfair or unreasonable. Who appeal to a child's wish to understand rather than the wish to avoid pain. Who reward and reinforce consciousness in a child rather than discourage and penalize it. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam, 1994, pp. 191-192]

16 In the end, if children are to acquire competence and character, they need to have sustained relationships with people who care about their intellectual and moral growth. Any improvement in our schools must begin by making sure that these kinds of relationships are available to all students. It must also ensure that teachers have effective conceptual and instructional tools to help them guide their student's development in the right direction. The instructional relationship between teacher and student is always the place "where the rubber meets the road": that is, where academic knowledge is communicated, where student curiosity is piqued, where skills and work habits are nurtured, and where lifelong dispositions towards learning are shaped. [William

> Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 200-201]

Related:
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– Why might young people dislike school?
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?

26. How do adult expectations influence young people?

1 Simply put, expectations can be healthy or they can be toxic. Our challenge as parents and teachers is to recognize, hold, and communicate the healthy ones. ...

Studies have found that the extent to which parents regularly communicate high academic expectations for their children ("You can do well" not "you must do well") had a *far* greater effect on the kids' academic performance than any other parental behavior, including how strictly parents supervised their children's free time or monitored their homework. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 157]

2 Firmness refers to the degree and consistency of limits that parents impose on their child's behavior. Firm parents have clearly articulated the rules they expect their children to follow, and they make demands on the child to behave in a mature and responsible fashion. ...

We learn how to regulate ourselves by being regulated. Children acquire self-control by taking the rules that their parents have imposed on them and imposing them on themselves. When the external control isn't there to begin with, the internal control won't develop. ...

Naturally, parents' specific rules and expectations should change as their child matures and displays an increasingly capacity for self-regulation. A parent's job is to pay attention to these signs and to adjust the rules accordingly. ...

Here are some tips on how to be a firm parent:

Make your expectations clear. ... Explain your rules and decisions. When children understand the logic behind their parents' expectations, it is much easier for them to figure out how to behave on their own. ... *Be consistent. ... Be fair. ... Avoid harsh punishment. ...*

Your expectations should be set so that meeting them will require a level of maturity that slightly exceeds what your child has shown up until that point, but that is still

within your child's reach. [Laurence Steinberg, *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014, pp. 129-135]

3 [Inductive disciplinary] techniques succeed because they lead children to understand, and accept, the *standards* that their parents are trying to communicate rather than focusing only on the *sanctions* through which parents enforce these standards. An effective parental influence encounter ... will ensure that the aspect of the encounter most salient to the child will be the attitude or behavior that the parent is trying to instill rather than the child's punishment for refusing to comply. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 180]

4 [S]tudents who grow up with excessive performance expectations are at strikingly high risk for mental health problems in adolescence and young adulthood. So a first step, as a parent or a teacher, is to figure out where the kid *is*. Are they feeling expectations that aren't there? Are they feeling fearful of failure? The best way to get to these answers is simple: ask them. ...

Parents can set the tone for healthy expectations in a multitude of ways: ...

"I have confidence that you can handle the challenges in your life [rather than "I have confidence you will always be successful"]." ...

"When I say I expect you to do well, what I really mean is that I think you can do well and that I'm confident in you as a student—and as a person."

"I think about the big picture. The world is full of successful people who weren't top students. So if you're not an academic superstar, it doesn't bother me. I know you're smart enough to get an education and learn skills that are helpful to people." [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 160-163]

5 [P]arental pressures to meet harsh performance demands, while perhaps temporarily successful in driving academic achievement, are ultimately destructive. This does not mean that high expectations for children are potentially lethal. On the contrary, high

expectations are found to promote achievement and competence in children. It is when a parent's love is experienced as *conditional* on achievement that children are at risk for serious emotional problems. These are children who are driven to be "perfect" in the hope of garnering parental love and acceptance. Their inevitable missteps activate intense feelings of shame and hopelessness. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure And Material Advantage Are Creating A Generation Of Disconnected And Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 29-30]

6 The best way to ensure the healthy kind of expectations is to encourage kids to set *their own* expectations of themselves—without being burdened by perfectionism, fear of failure, and fear of disappointing other people.

A large part of this work includes encouraging them to set their own goals. ... We should teach them about what are called SMART goals—goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound. ...

There's an important prerequisite to setting goals, though: the child's belief that they can attain whatever goal they set. Support goal-setting by encouraging positive self-talk —which is an important tool of cognitive behavioral therapy—or verbal affirmations, which has been a staple of self-help psychology for almost a century. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, p. 164]

7 William H. Jeynes, who has studied parental expectations for decades, says that the healthiest expectations don't come via edicts nor are they voiced as demands like, "You'd better make the cross-country team next year, because you're going to need it for college applications!" Healthy expectations are more often unspoken and communicated by modeling a strong work ethic, a strong faith in the future, and "a pleasantly steadfast spirit." ...

We've written a lot ... about words to say, questions to ask, and ideals to model. But we want to leave you with the idea that so often, the best way to convey the right kind of expectations is simply to trust your kids. ...

Remember, it all comes back to relationships—and is much less about saying exactly the right words—whether about expectations or anything else—and more about how we make our kids feel. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk*

with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 167, 181]



8 "If you think the best of people, they will give you their best." That may be the most useful advice I have ever received. I make myself think the best of students. Sometimes trusting and encouraging are not easy. Still, the good teacher must trust. [Sam Pickering, *Letters to a Teacher*, Atlantic Monthly, 2004, p. 46]

9 There's a vast amount of research in what happens when we believe a student is especially talented. We begin to lavish extra attention on them and hold them to higher expectations. We expect them to excel, and that expectation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. [Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, Scribner / Simon & Schuster, 2016, p. 26]

10 Teachers' expectations have radical implications for the achievements of their students. If teachers convey to students that they expect them to do well, it's much more likely that they will. If they expect them to do badly, that's more likely too. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, p. 108]

11 [A] teacher who believes only one or two of the students in each of his classes are capable of doing fine work will in subtle ways communicate that lack of faith. Then his exhortations and promises ring false. They reach the student's unconscious finally as discouragement. [Ken Macrorie, *Uptaught*, Hayden Book Co., 1970, p. 116]

12 In schools the process of self-fulfilling prophecy involves several steps. First, teachers anticipate that certain students will succeed in school, while others will not ... Second, these expectations invariably influence the ways teachers relate to students. For example, teachers spend less time with students whom they believe are less likely to succeed (Allington, 1980). Not only are these interchanges fewer, but they are of dubious educational value. ... Given this kind of treatment it is not surprising that students of

whom little is expected, and little help given, will fall progressively behind and, in effect, complete the third step of the prophecy cycle—by acting in ways that fulfill the teacher's initial predictions of incompetency. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 114-115]

13 Adolescents who are absorbing negative messages about who they are and what is expected of them may sink to that level instead of realizing their true potential. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of being." Adolescence is not a period of being "crazy" or "immature." It is an essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement, and creativity. This is the essence of how we "ought" to be, of what we are capable of, and of what we need as individuals and as a human family. [Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, Penguin, 2013, p. 4]

14 Visiting another university, I had lunch with a poet who was also a professor of creative writing. He spoke highly of the work of his graduate students, a welcome surprise to me to hear a good word about the lower classes. But he added, "And the undergraduates, they were—well, you know, undergraduates."

In his *Life and Times*, the former slave Frederick Douglass said:

"Man derives a sense of his consequences in the world not merely subjectively but objectively. If from the cradle through life the outside world brands a class as unfit for this or that work, the character of the class will come to resemble and conform to the character described. To find valuable qualities in our fellows, such qualities must be presumed and expected." [Ken Macrorie, *Uptaught*, Hayden Book Co., 1970, p. 75]

15 The work load for T-eachers in conventional S-chools is so heavy only because the S-chools and the T-eachers believe, and soon convince the children, that everything that is learned must be T-aught. So the T-eachers must spend hundreds of hours trying to cope with and outwit the kind of children's evasive tactics I wrote about in *How Children Fail:* They make children anxious and dependent, and then say, rightly, how hard it is to deal with their anxiety and dependency. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 77]

16 Having by our method induced helplessness, we straightway make the helplessness a reason for our method. [Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical*, 1860, D. Appleton, 1896, p. 126, https://archive.org/details/spencereducation00spen]

17 It is truly amazing, as pointed up by our findings, that if people are ongoingly treated as if they were either passive mechanisms or barbarians needing to be controlled, they will begin to act more and more that way. As they are controlled, for example, they are likely to act more and more as if they need to be controlled. That fact has led some commentators to conclude that society should use more controls. It has led to the call for greater discipline, for more heavy handedness. But ironically, it should call for just the opposite. This phenomenon behooves us to insist even more emphatically that it is time to stop looking for the easy answers contained in the reliance on control and instead to start employing more autonomy-supportive approaches. [Edward L. Deci with Richard Flaste, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self-Motivation*, Penguin, 1996, pp. 83-84]

18 Low expectation ... is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children become, to a considerable degree, what they are told it is "appropriate" to *wish* to be. In this respect, I think it can be said that most of us need a sense of "sanction" or "authentication"—an "empowering voice"—in order to believe it is our right or our vocation to become just, passionate and risk-taking human beings. Conversely, there is limitless power of expropriation, for most children, in the voice that tells them it does not belong to them to yearn to be such men or women. We build perimeters around the ethical aspirations of our students by the very terms we teach them to bring to their own act of self-description. [Jonathan Kozol, *The Night is Dark and I Am Far From Home*, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, pp. 71-73]

19 [W]ith each passing year, we seem to find new ways to let kids know that life is full of risks and hardships that they can't handle without our persistent aid and vigilance. ...

[O]ur physical protectiveness of children has reached so deeply into their routine activities that one wonders if we are actually training them for timidity...

We are also sending negative messages by pathologizing our children. Increasing numbers in recent years have been diagnosed as "learning disabled," a disparaging and misleading label that wields enormous influence over how a child is perceived, treated, and medicated. ... The label "disabled" itself can become self-fulfilling, since children are

acutely aware of how they are being appraised, and they base their own self-conceptions largely on how others see them. Our use of this labeling for ever larger segments of the population (especially boys) indicates a more general tendency to perceive children as fragile and inept creatures, who need constant protection from the ordinary challenges of everyday living. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 169-170]

20 The surest way to breed incompetence (and low self-esteem of the *real* kind) in a child is to treat the child as incompetent. If a parent assumes that a child cannot be counted on to accomplish a task, the child takes that message to heart. The child thinks that "I am not the kind of person who can ..."; and a negative belief in one's own capacities forms. ...

In actuality, children are far more competent at early ages than adults in our society give them credit for. They thrive on challenges and on chances to prove themselves. Competence motivation is a natural part of every child's repertoire. If encouraged, it enables children to develop their capacities with zest and vigor. Still, we have found many ways to discourage children's native competence drive. Not the least of these are our unfounded doubts about children's abilities to be helpful. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. 83-84]

21 In all the places that children are raised—the family, the school, the community—one conspicuous change has occurred within the lifetime of everyone reading this book: All the commonly accepted standards for young people's skills and behavior have fallen drastically. Less is expected of the young, and in turn less is received. Either as a cause or as a result, instruction, discipline, the very fostering of competence and character in the young are fast becoming lost arts. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, pp. xii-xiii]

22 [T]he way you *honor* a human being is to ask of him an effort. ... In the hopeless popularization and down-marketing of our crafts, we don't honor the student, we condescend to him, and that is a hideous hideous contempt. You honor him by what you ask and demand. [George Steiner, "On the History of Literacy," 2002, *YouTube*,

> uploaded by Infame filmes, 13 June 2019, 39:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH0MXdeGwSE]

Related:
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?
– How can we foster self-directed learning in others?
– Why is trust and faith in young people important in education?

27. Why is trust and faith in young people important in education?

1 Free adults who undertake sustained and serious inquiry are not made from scratch—they are cultivated on trust. Education begins from the assumption that students are capable of taking responsibility for their own learning and that they are naturally motivated, even driven from within to pursue fundamental questions. That assumption is based on nothing other than the simple humanity of the student … [Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life*, Princeton UP, 2020, p. 196]

2 There is [an] attitude which stands out in those who are successful in facilitating learning. … I think of it as prizing the learner, prizing his feelings, his opinions, his person. … It is a basic trust—a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy. …

It would be most unlikely that one could … commit himself to being a facilitator of learning, unless he has come to have a profound trust in the human organism and its potentialities. If I distrust the human being then I *must* cram him with information of my own choosing, lest he go his own mistaken way. But if I trust the capacity of the human individual for developing his own potentiality, then I can provide him with many opportunities and permit him to choose his own way and his own direction in his learning. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, pp. 109, 114]

3 The richness of experience that was available [at First Street School] was the result of … the kind of freedom we offered. But let me replace the word "freedom" with more specific terms: 1) we trusted that some true organic bond existed between the wishes of the children and their actual needs, and 2) we acceded to their wishes (though certainly not to all of them), and thus encouraged their childish desiring to take on the qualities of decision-making. …

We could not have devised a more constructive way of scheduling Maxine than the way she devised for herself simply by expressing her wishes. But these wishes would not have been acted upon if we teachers had not already been convinced that the preferences of children lie close to their actual needs. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The*

Story of the First Street School, 1969, Vintage Books / Random House, 1970, pp. 21-22, 19]

4 Trust [the child] in a certain degree with himself. Suffer him in some instances to select his own course of reading. There is danger that there should be something too studied and monotonous in the selection we should make for him. Suffer him to wander in the wilds of literature. There is a principal in the human mind by which a man seems to know his own time, and it will sometimes be much better that he should engage in the perusal of books at the period of his own choice, than at the time that you may recollect to put them in his hands. Man is a creature that loves to act from himself; and actions performed in this way, have infinitely more of sound health and vigour in them, than the actions to which he is prompted by a will foreign to his own. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 1797, Garland, 1971, p. 144, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

5 [T]he child's potentialities to love, to be happy, to use his reason, and more specific potentialities like artistic gifts ... are the seeds which grow and become manifest if the proper conditions for their development are given, and they can be stifled if these are absent.

One of the most important of these conditions is that the significant person in a child's life have faith in these potentialities. The presence of this faith makes the difference between education and manipulation. Education is identical with helping the child realize his potentialities. The opposite of education is manipulation, which is based on the absence of faith in the growth of potentialities, and on the conviction that a child will be right only if the adults put into him what is desirable and suppress what seems to be undesirable. [Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 1956, Perennial Library, 1989, pp. 112-113]

6 The teacher [in me] had been conditioned from the time I entered kindergarten: School was for learning. Time must be filled up with measurably meaningful activity. Work must be demanding and have an edge that proves it's serious. The goals of learning must be set out clearly and measurably. Part of me has not been able to escape the feeling that if I can't control learning and know what my students are doing, then learning isn't taking place and I'm not doing my job.

The educator in me knows that the teacher is often misguided when it comes to understanding how learning takes place. Trusting students, letting things move toward goals in diverse and frequently digressive ways, following enthusiasms, and responding to events and experiences are not diversions or wastes of time. Rather, they are the essence of substantive learning. [Herbert Kohl, *The Herb Kohl Reader: Awakening the Heart of Teaching*, New Press, 2009, p. 96]

7 The antidote to fear is trust, and we all have a desire to find something to trust in an uncertain world. Fear and trust are powerful forces, and while they are not opposites, exactly, trust is the best tool for driving out fear. There will always be plenty to be afraid of, especially when you are doing something new. Trusting others doesn't mean that they won't make mistakes. It means that if they do (or if you do), you trust they will act to help solve it. Fear can be created quickly; trust can't. Leaders must demonstrate their trustworthiness, over time, through their actions—and the best way to do that is by responding well to failure. [Ed Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*, Random House, 2013, pp. 124-125]

8 Rather than trying to prevent all errors, we should assume, as is almost always the case, that our people's intentions are good and that they want to solve problems. Give them responsibility, let the mistakes happen, and let people fix them. If there is fear, there is a reason—our job is to find the reason and to remedy it. Management's job is not to prevent risk but to build the ability to recover. [Ed Catmull, *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*, Random House, 2013, p. 128]

9 [T]he credo of progressive education was stated by that other Enlightenment man, long before Dewey. In a letter to Du Pont de Nemours, Jefferson said: "We both consider the people as our children, and love them with parental affection. But you love them as infants whom you are afraid to trust without nurses; and I as adults whom I freely leave to self-government." [Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man*, Free Press, 1968, pp. 282-284]

10 If our children have the benefit of a loving relationship with us, a bar set high enough to give them something to reach for, and a sense of being understood and valued for themselves, then we've done the best we can to ensure that grades, schools, and

eventually work will fall into place. ... [I]n spite of knowing all this and more, most of us still find it hard to pull back, to have faith in our children and in the evolution of their lives. What we see as concern they rightfully experience as a vote of no confidence. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 34-35]

11 The barrier of mistrust helps explain the frustrating generational divide. It's a *war over meaning*. Mistrust makes young people subtly read between the lines of each comment their elders make, trying to interpret the hidden implications of our words, to determine if we are disrespecting them or not. Young people focus more on the *unsaid* part than the *said* part. For instance, when a teenager's mother asks, "Did you brush your teeth?" the child interprets it as, "I think you're so incompetent that you won't even remember something so simple as brushing your teeth"—even though the mother never said the second part. Given that interpretation, anger makes sense. It's humiliating to be told you're incompetent—even if the mother said no such thing. ...

There persists a disconnect between what higher-power adults intend to communicate when we speak and what young people hear us say. On the adults' side, we think we're doing everything for them while they don't appreciate it. On their side, they think we're disrespecting them and looking down on them. [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, p. 88]

12 Many mothers have written us ... telling (often sadly) about their own little children furiously rejecting their well-meant and loving efforts to help or teach them. Children resist, almost always angrily, all such unasked-for teaching because they hear in it the (perhaps unconscious) message, "You're not smart enough to see that this is important to learn, and even if you were, you're not smart enough to learn it." Naturally it makes them hurt and angry. "Let me do it by myself!" they shout. That's just what we should do. If they need help, they will ask for it—at least, as long as we give it when it is asked for. If, in our eagerness to teach and help them, we send them enough of these messages of doubt and distrust, we may soon destroy most of all of their confidence in their ability to learn for themselves, and convince them that they really are too lazy, incurious, and stupid to learn. We will have made our fears come true. [John Holt, *How Children Learn*, 1964, Da Capo Press, 1982, p. 68]

13 What most concerns me [are] ... the things that S-chools teach *simply by the fact of being S-chools*, of having the power to compel children to attend, to tell them what to learn, and to grade, rank, and label them. As long as the Schools have these powers this part of the curriculum cannot be changed, and all who work in such S-chools help to teach this curriculum whether they want to or not, and even when they think they are teaching the very opposite.

The first message that S-chools, like any other compulsory institution, send to the people who attend them is a message of distrust and contempt: If we didn't make you come here you wouldn't learn anything, you'd just waste your time, spend the whole day playing basketball or watching TV or making trouble, you'd hang out on the streets, never do anything worthwhile, grow up to be a bum.

Along with this goes the message: Even if you could be trusted to want to find out about the world, you are too stupid to do it. Not only do we have to decide what you need to learn, but then we have to show you, one tiny step at a time, how to learn it. You could never figure it out for yourself, or even have enough sense to ask good questions about it. The world is too complicated, mysterious, and difficult for you. We can't let you explore it. We must make sense of it for you. You can only learn about it from us. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, pp. 171-172]

14 Far from helping students to develop into mature, self-reliant, self-motivated individuals, schools seem to do everything they can to keep youngsters in a state of chronic, almost infantile, dependency. The pervasive atmosphere of distrust, together with the rules covering the most minute aspects of existence, teach students every day that they are not people of worth, and certainly not individuals capable of regulating their own behavior. [Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom*, 1970, quoted by Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 164]

15 [T]he children who always forget things in school may not forget so much because their memories are bad as because they never dare trust their memories. Even when they are right, they still feel wrong. They are never willing enough to bet on their hunch that something is so, to turn it into a conviction that it really is so. [John Holt, *How Children Learn*, 1964, Da Capo Press, 1982, pp. 145]

16 [A]t the extreme, many people never overcome the easy merger with a source of protection and power, and this gives rise to a genuine pathology of perception. The person mistrusts himself, his judgment and decisions; he fears initiating action, standing alone; he has a sense of always being less than those around him, of needing the strong hand of the trusted leader on his shoulder to point him at what to do, to steady him, to give his life the mandate that it needs. And this is logical: if you remain fixated to the source of support and protection, you never do find out what it means to stand on your own and judge reality for yourself. You accept the opinions of those who offer you easy support, whether it be the mother or other authorities who "represent" her: big brother, the elders, the tribe or the nation. [Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*, Free Press, 1971, p. 161]

17 In one way or another our methods produce in the young a condition of pain that seems very close to a mass neurosis: a lack of faith in oneself, a vacuum of spirit into which authority or institutions can move, a dependency they feed on. Students are encouraged to relinquish their own wills, their freedom of volition; ... almost everything in their education is designed to discourage them from activity, from the wedding of idea and act. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 814]

18 [I]n an attempt to gain or hold love, approval, esteem, the individual relinquishes the locus of evaluation which was his in infancy, and places it in others. He learns to have a basic *dis*trust for his own experiencing as a guide to his behavior. He learns from others a large number of conceived values, and adopts them as his own, even though they may be widely discrepant from what he is experiencing. ...

I believe that this picture of the individual, with values mostly introjected, held as fixed concepts, rarely examined or tested, is the picture of most of us. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, pp. 245-247]

19 [A] change which occurs as the result of successful psychotherapy is that the patient comes to feel increasing confidence in his own judgment. ... [Carl] Rogers also notes that the client who improves 'increasingly trusts and values the process which is himself'. It is very characteristic of depressed and dependent people that they attribute

more value to the judgment of others than to their own; which is why, during the course of therapy, the therapist must always take the attitude of helping the patient to find his own answers rather than guiding him or giving him direct advice. Part of growing up is to realize that one's own thoughts and feelings may be trustworthy guides for oneself, even if others do not necessarily find them so, for them. [Anthony Storr, *The Art of Psychotherapy*, Methuen, 1980, p. 153]

20 The more we retreat from the responsibility of independence, the more daunting the prospect of such responsibility appears. We feel more and more unequal to the challenge. How can we rely on a mind we have learned not to trust?

Or again, the more we surrender to the fear of disapproval, the more we lose face in our eyes, the more desperate we become for *someone's* approval. Within us there is a void that should have been occupied by self-esteem. When we attempt to fill it with the approval of others instead, the void grows deeper and the hunger for acceptance and approval grows stronger. [Nathaniel Branden, *Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life*, 1996, Fireside / Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 67]

21 Self-esteem, fully realized, is the experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self-esteem is: 1. confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life; and 2. confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts. ...

To trust one's mind and to know that one is worthy of happiness is the essence of self-esteem. [Nathaniel Branden, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, Bantam Books, 1994, p. 4]

22 The great object of Education should be commensurate with the object of life. It should be a moral one; to teach self-trust; to inspire the youthful man with an interest in himself; with a curiosity touching his own nature; to acquaint him with the resources of his mind, and to teach him that there is all his strength ... [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 10, 1909, pp. 133-134, https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/emerson-the-works-of-ralph-waldo-emerson-vol-10-lectures-and-biographical-sketches]

23 When we permitted students the freedom of choice and gave them easy access to the community, we found that ideas acquired weight and value to the extent that students were allowed to try them out in action. It was in practical and social situations that their own strength increased, and the merging of the two—strengthened self and tested knowledge—moved them more quickly toward manhood than anything else I have seen.

One might make a formula of it: to the extent that students had freedom of volition and access to experience, knowledge became important. But volition and access were of absolute value; ... without them, nothing worked. So we had to trust the students to make their own choices, no matter what we thought of them. We learned to take their risks with them—and to survive. In that sense we became equals, and that equality may in the end be more educational for students than anything else. That, in fact, may be the most important thing we learned. [Peter Marin, "The Open Truth and Fiery Vehemence of Youth," 1969, *The Cosmos Reader*, edited by Edgar Z. Friedenberg et al., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971, p. 817]

Related:
– How do adult expectations influence young people?
– How capable are young people of directing their education? Who should decide what they learn?

28. What is the power of words? Why should we learn to write, speak, and read well?

1 It is important to realize that man possesses only one tool for his highly critical appraisal of experience, namely, words. Life's meaning is contained, fabricated and elaborated primarily in words. Words give man the motivation to act, and words justify the act. Life-meaning for man is predominantly an edifice of words and word sounds. ...

The person who can put more words together in more varied combinations has, theoretically, a larger world in which to move. [Ernest Becker, *The Ernest Becker Reader*, edited by Daniel Liechty, Ernest Becker Foundation / Washington UP, 2005, pp. 43-44, 87]

2 [O]ur language habits are at the core of how we imagine the world. And to the degree that we are unaware of how our ways of talking put such ideas in our heads, we are not in full control of our situation. It needs hardly to be said that one of the purposes of an education is to give us greater control of our situation. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 175]

3 [W]e use language to create the world—which is to say, language is not only a vehicle of thought; it is, as Wittgenstein said, also the driver. We go where it leads. We see the world as it permits us to see it. ... Is anyone in our schools taking this seriously? ...

By failing to reveal the story of human beings as world-makers through language, [teachers] miss several profound opportunities. They fail, for example, to convey the idea that there is an inescapable moral dimension to how we use language. ... To use language to defend the indefensible (as George Orwell claimed some of us habitually do), to use language to transform certain human beings into nonpersons, to use language to lie and to blur distinctions, to say more than you know or *can* know, to take the name of truth in vain—these are offenses against a moral order, and they can, incidentally, be committed with excellent pronunciation or with impeccable grammar and spelling. Our engagement with language almost always has a moral dimension ... [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 83-85]

4 Dale Carnegie's unambiguous message: "It matters not what you *mean*: you and those around you become according to what you *say*." This simple and crucial fact for understanding human behavior stares us so disarmingly in the face that we pass on to more involved and less important things. The proper word or phrase, properly delivered, is the highest attainment of human interpersonal power. ...

We already saw that this fact is central to the development of the ego, how magically the child gets his gratification if he learns the right words. The word, a mere sound, miraculously obliges the adult to do one's bidding; it brings food and warmth, and closeness. The word which pleases the angry adult transforms him before one's eyes into a smiling, appreciative protector. So it is no wonder that in our adult life we carry over some of this early enchantment with the magical efficacy of words, this conviction that everything in the universe can hang delicately on the proper sound ... [Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Problem of Man*, Free Press, 1971, pp. 93-94]

5 The highest function of education, I maintain, is to help people understand the meaning of their lives ... If we are to transcend our own immediate environment, we must have access to the record of past and present, learn the skills needed to interpret it, and learn to tell good data from poor ... We must be able to read, and to know where what we read fits into the structure of human experience; and to write with enough subtlety and complexity to convey the special quality of our mind to others. [Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America: Growth and Acquiescence*, Vintage / Random House, 1965, pp. 221-224]

6 To give to our thoughts their genuine and appropriate language, is one of the most wholesome exercises in which we can be engaged. Without this exercise it is scarcely possible that we should learn to think with precision and correctness. [William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 1797, Garland, 1971, p. 149, https://archive.org/details/enquirerreflecti00godw/page/n3/mode/2up]

7 I'm teaching this [poetry] class because you, in order to lead the lives that you want, need to understand the power of language. You need to be able to hear language and know what it means. You have to hear language and know what it *implies*. You have to hear language and know what is *not* being said and what is being said. You have to

develop your own power of articulation to be able to express what you know and what you want. ... I'm going to work with you, through poetry, to increase your command of language, and your ability for self-presentation. ...

[In my class,] I was giving [students] an introduction to an art-form that is as old as any human activity. And I wanted them to hear how people had shaped sound to capture and convey meaning. ... Robert Frost [said], "Poetry is a way of remembering what it would impoverish us to forget." ... You're not just learning about language; this language is a way of seeing the world that actually exists. ... [My students were] converted to the notion that [poetry] was one of the vessels of human wisdom in which they can participate. And by learning it and by reading it and by memorizing it they were awakening themselves to their own sense of their own human capacity. [Dana Gioia, "The Deepest Conversation I've Ever Had About Writing," *You Tube*, uploaded by David Perell, 26 Feb. 2025, 1:10:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvfLmbHkBV4]

8 Reading is intimately tied to writing. The most important thing to read is your own writing ... [b]ut, beyond your own writing, reading is really the key to entering the conceptual world. It is the means of independent access to the accumulated knowledge and ideas of the whole of human history. ...

[W]riting [is] a tool of life and thought that is not restricted to English classes. Writing is a skill that is essential to every subject and is a continuous part of the curriculum. ... Every teacher should be a teacher of English. ...

[Writing] is a necessity of mind training, a necessity of learning the proper use of concepts, a necessity of learning exact, logical thought. It is impossible to organize your thoughts on any complex subject without the use of written formulations. ... You must get your thinking in front of you in some shape that you can hold and slowly review and study from different aspects. ...

You cannot distinguish between perfecting your thinking and perfecting your writing. Editing or revising your writing is the process of perfecting your thinking and there is no other way to do it. [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, pp. 44-46]

9 The primary reason to write an essay is so that the writer can formulate and organize an informed, coherent and sophisticated set of ideas about something important. ...

[I]f you want to have a life characterized by competence, productivity, security, originality and engagement ... you need to think carefully about important issues. There is no better way to do so than to write. ...

If you sharpen your capacity to think and to communicate as a consequence of writing, you are better armed. The pen is mightier than the sword, as the saying goes. This is no cheap cliché. Ideas change the world, particularly when they are written. ...

If you learn to write and to edit, you will also be able to tell the difference between good ideas, intelligently presented, and bad ideas put forth by murky and unskilled thinkers. ... Then you can be properly influenced by profound and solid ideas instead of falling prey to foolish fads and whims and ideologies, which can range in their danger from trivial to mortal. ...

Those who can think and communicate are simply more powerful than those who cannot, and powerful in the good way, the way that means "able to do a wide range of things competently and efficiently." ...

Don't ever underestimate the power of words. [Jordan Peterson, "Essay Writing Guide," 2018, https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=https://jordanbpeterson.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Essay_Writing_Guide.docx]

10 [W]riting is not just a way to convey ideas, but also a way to have them.

A good writer doesn't just think, and then write down what he thought, as a sort of transcript. A good writer will almost always discover new things in the process of writing. And there is, as far as I know, no substitute for this kind of discovery. Talking about your ideas with other people is a good way to develop them. But even after doing this, you'll find you still discover new things when you sit down to write. There is a kind of thinking that can only be done by writing. ...

[I]f you need to solve a complicated, ill-defined problem, it will almost always help to write about it. Which in turn means that someone who's not good at writing will almost always be at a disadvantage in solving such problems.

You can't think well without writing well, and you can't write well without reading well. And I mean that last "well" in both senses. You have to be good at reading (at extracting meaning from words), and read good things. [Paul Graham, "The Need to Read," Nov. 2022, http://www.paulgraham.com/read.html]

11 Writing about something, even something you know well, usually shows you that you didn't know it as well as you thought. … [P]utting your ideas into words change[s] them. …

The reason I've spent so long establishing this rather obvious point is that it leads to another that many people will find shocking. If writing down your ideas always makes them more precise and more complete, then no one who hasn't written about a topic has fully formed ideas about it. And someone who never writes has no fully formed ideas about anything nontrivial.

It feels to them as if they do, especially if they're not in the habit of critically examining their own thinking. Ideas can feel complete. It's only when you try to put them into words that you discover they're not. So if you never subject your ideas to that test, you'll not only never have fully formed ideas, but also never realize it. [Paul Graham, "Putting Ideas Into Words," Feb. 2022, http://www.paulgraham.com/words.html]

12 [*W*]*e learn by expressing, not by thinking*, which is to say that knowledge doesn't really exist until you can write it down. What we normally imagine as "thinking" is really just a distracted form of writing, like having a disoriented drunk at a typewriter behind your eyes. Writing sobers him up. The pen (or the word processor) lets the mind compose language into knowledge that's far more sophisticated than what the little boozer can do on his own.

On the spectrum of sophistication, speaking falls somewhere between thinking and writing, but it's the form of language (or thought) construction we use the most. I find that once I articulate something in speech, it sticks in my mind more or less intact—but only for a little while. If it's a thought I want to build on, writing is the only option. Otherwise, it will gradually get pulled into the quicksand of my consciousness, forgotten or folded into a mix of ill-considered motivations. [Evan Puschak, *Escape into Meaning: Essays on Superman, Public Benches, and Other Obsessions*, Atria / Simon & Schuster, 2022, p. 7]

13 Writing, which reflects the quality of your thinking, is significantly improved if you steep yourself in literature.

A broad exposure to the skilled, evocative use of concepts and an analysis of how literature achieves precise cognition and emotional effects is invaluable training for your own use of concepts. … It will improve your precision, clarity, and proficiency at using words to express your own thoughts. [Leonard Peikoff, *Teaching Johnny to Think: A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*, edited by Marlene Trollope, Ayn Rand Institute, 2014, p. 55]

14 [T]he addiction to useless info leads to what I call "intellectual obesity." …

The way I beat intellectual obesity was by trying to become the best writer I can be. Writing requires you to filter out bad information because you have a duty to your readers to not be full of shit. Writing also forces you to periodically shut out information altogether so you can be alone with your thoughts. This regular confrontation with yourself helps you keep your bearings in a world constantly trying to lure you away from your brain. [Gurwinder, "The Intellectual Obesity Crisis," *Substack*, 12 May 2022, https://www.gurwinder.blog/p/the-intellectual-obesity-crisis]

15 Every time you're on stage, or every time you write something for someone else to read, all the people in the audience, all the people who read your writing, are giving you the honor of time they could be spending elsewhere. You are responsible for every second they give you. You need to give them gifts—including the truth as you understand it to be—commensurate with that every moment. [Milbre Burch, quoted by Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, pp. 27-28]

16 Every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant and interesting. [Aldous Huxley, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, pp. 50-54]

17 These are not books, lumps of lifeless paper, but *minds* alive on the shelves. From each of them goes out its own voice … and just as the touch of a button on our set will fill the

room with music, so by taking down one of these volumes and opening it, one can call into range the voice of a man far distant in time and space, and hear him speaking to us, mind to mind, heart to heart. [Gilbert Highet, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, pp. 50-54]

18 The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them. [Mark Twain, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, pp. 50-54]

19 The way a book is read—which is to say, the qualities a reader brings to a book—can have as much to do with its worth as anything the author puts into it ... Anyone who can read can learn how to read deeply and thus live more fully. [Norman Cousins, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, pp. 50-54]

20 One must be an inventor to read well. ... There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," 1837, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965, p. 69]

21 In a very real sense, people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read ... It is not true that we have only one life to live; if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish. [S. I. Hayakawa, quoted by Lawrence J. Peter, *Peter's Quotations: Ideas For Our Time*, Bantam, 1977, pp. 50-54]

22 Reading a physical book in a slow, deliberative, and careful manner sharpens a type of innovative, empathetic, creative, and critical thinking that is otherwise hard for humans to access. It requires us to literally rewire our brain to do that type of thinking, and without a concerted effort we will not develop those skills. If we avoid the slow and deliberate reading of actual physical books, if we mainly consume information on screens ... the sophistication with which [we] understand and later make sense of information is decreased. ...

We need to think about a serious reading habit as an exceptional activity, one that you need to isolate and support and really prioritize in your life. … I'm increasingly convinced that the serious reading of good books needs to be in all our personal definitions of a deep life. [Cal Newport, "The Joys of the Reading Life," *YouTube*, uploaded by Cal Newport, 6 March 2023, 15:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=807retANzfA]

23 Compare the considerable cognitive effort required for reading a book with that required for television. Rather than imagining a woman with the flush of dawn in her eyes, we turn on the TV, and a beautiful blue-eyed woman appears before us. No assembly required. The mind reacts rather than creates. The cognitive effort is close to zero.

There is also the "cut-away effect" created by commercials; we become invested in a story only to have it interrupted every ten minutes or so for advertising. The brain is so clever that it begins to anticipate these disruptions and cruises along at a shallow level. …

Visual media can challenge the mind, of course. … [T]he visual arts can take us to worlds that we cannot otherwise fathom.

For the most part, however, the visual presentation of information is a cognitively cheaper replacement for the more difficult process of reading. … [E]lectronic brevity insulates us from the more mentally challenging interactions that used to make up most of our workday and leisure time. For all their good, new technologies reduce our overall cognitive effort. … Every technical advance simplifies another bit of cognitive work that we used to do ourselves. Bit by bit, the loss adds up. [Shlomo Breznitz and Collins Hemingway, *Maximum Brainpower: Challenging the Brain for Health and Wisdom*, Ballantine / Random House, 2012, pp. 173-175]

24 I think that unless you read deeply and in your own interest, unless you explore what is most profound in what has come before you, then you never will get down to the recesses of your own self. You never learn what Ralph Waldo Emerson called self-trust and self-reliance. And most deeply perhaps, you never will *heal* the self. I think that in a culture which has all of the peculiar difficulties and complexities of the one currently developing around us, there is nothing more profoundly healing than the act of solitary reading, provided that what is being read is indeed permanent, deep, lasting work—

work that calls for all of your faculties in response, ... work that transforms you. [Harold Bloom, interview with Charlie Rose, 11 July 2000, 6:25, https://charlierose.com/videos/5604]

25 Ultimately we read—as Bacon, Johnson, and Emerson agree—in order to strengthen the self, and to learn its authentic interests. ...

We read deeply for varied reasons, most of them familiar: that we cannot know enough people profoundly enough; that we need to know ourselves better; that we require knowledge, not just of self and others, but of the way things are. Yet the strongest, more authentic motive for deep reading of the now much-abused traditional canon is the search for a difficult pleasure. ... There is a reader's Sublime, and it seems the only secular transcendence we can ever attain, except for the even more precarious transcendence we call "falling in love." I urge you to find what truly comes near to you, that can be used for weighing and for considering. Read deeply, not to believe, not to accept, not to contradict, but to learn to share in that one nature that writes and reads. [Harold Bloom, *How To Read And Why*, Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 2000, pp. 22, 28-29]

26 It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had wellnigh thought and said. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," 1837, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965, p. 68]

27 The English major is, first of all, a reader. ... [He] reads because as rich as the one life he has may be, one life is not enough. ... [He] wants the joy of seeing the world through the eyes of people who—let us admit it—are more sensitive, more articulate, shrewder, sharper, more alive than they themselves are. The experience of changing minds and hearts with Proust or James or Austin is one that is incomparably enriching. It makes you see that there is more to the world than you had ever imagined was possible. You see

> that life is bigger, sweeter, more tragic and intense—more alive with meaning than you had thought.
>
> Real reading is *reincarnation*. There is no other way to put it. It is being born again into a higher form of consciousness than we ourselves possess. ... If the English major has the wherewithal for it, the energy and the openness of heart, he lives not once but hundreds of times. ...
>
> Love for language, hunger for life, openness and a quest for truth or truths: Those are the qualities of my English major in the ideal form. But of course now we're talking about more than a mere academic major. We're talking about a way of life. We're talking about a way of living that places inquiry into how to live in the world—what to be, how to act, how to move through time—at its center. What we're talking about is a path to becoming a human being, or at least a better sort of human being than one was at the start. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 112-114, 118]

28 > The job of words is to direct us toward experience, to round out experience, to facilitate experience, and to give us ways to share at least pale shadows of that experience with those we love. And the job of words is to help us learn to be—and act—human. [Derrick Jensen, *Walking On Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green, 2004, pp. 166-167]

Related:
– How or why should we incorporate the spiritual, sacred, or transcendent in education?

29. How does our experience of school resources differ from those outside of school?

1 The very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes and treatments and professions are "academic" or "pedagogic," and others are not. The power of school thus to divide social reality has no boundaries: education becomes unworldly and the world becomes noneducational. ...

[E]ducational materials have been monopolized by school. Simple educational objects have been expensively packaged by the knowledge industry. They have become specialized tools for professional educators, and their cost has been inflated ...

In this atmosphere the student too often uses the map, the lab, the encyclopedia, or the microscope only at the rare moments when the curriculum tells him to do so. Even the great classics become part of "sophomore year" instead of marking a new turn in a person's life. School removes things from everyday use by labeling them educational tools. [Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 35, 115-116]

2 [A student] reads any book in a university class within the total context of a system that has blasted him with minutiae and dried him out with boredom. A book by Camus is not a novel, but an assignment. Another experience like waiting in line to register, listening to roll call, filling in the space in the test booklet. [Ken Macrorie, *Uptaught*, Hayden Book Co., 1970, pp. 55]

3 This is something that almost all successful students know, almost by instinct. ... [They do] most of [their] schoolwork thinking not, "What is this English or Math or History or Science all about?" but "What do *they* want? What are *they* likely to ask?" ... There was no continuum of experience for us; schoolwork was schoolwork, life was life, and they had nothing to do with each other. Our Physics teacher told us one day about the first splitting of an atom, and the enormous amounts of energy it released. Once satisfied that it would not be on any test, neither in or out of class did we ever give it another thought. [John Holt, *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better*, 1976, Sentient, 2004, p. 217]

4 I asked [students] one day to take home a weekday copy of *The New York Times* and study it ...

I knew my students weren't looking at the *Times*. They weren't developing a capacity for independent observation or for generalizing rigorously on close examination of details.

And when I think of their indoctrination, why should they? I ask them to look at a film or newspaper and put down what they see. "What does he want?" they are constantly saying as they look, seeing nothing for themselves. [Ken Macrorie, *Uptaught*, Hayden Book Co., 1970, pp. 161]

5 Nowhere ... do I find two words to suggest the possible goal of being one who *enters* history. ... "Why study history?" asks the wall-sized poster. The answer that we get is plain and uncomplex: in order to *teach* it, *total* it, *tell* it in writing, *cash* it in for profit, or *list* it alphabetically on index cards.

School teaches history the same way that it teaches syntax, grammar and word-preference: in terms that guarantee our prior exile from its passion and its transformation. [Jonathan Kozol, *The Night is Dark and I Am Far From Home*, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, p. 83]

6 Here is another idea, not meant to be funny: We can improve the quality of teaching and learning overnight by getting rid of all textbooks. Most textbooks are badly written and, therefore, give the impression that the subject is boring. Most textbooks are also impersonally written. They have no "voice," reveal no human personality. ... But worse than this, textbooks are concerned with presenting the facts of the case (whatever the case may be) as if there can be no disputing them, as if they are fixed and immutable. And still worse, there is usually no clue given as to who claimed these are the facts of the case, or how "it" discovered these facts (there being no he or she, I or we). There is no sense of the frailty or ambiguity of human judgment, no hint of the possibilities of error. Knowledge is presented as a commodity to be acquired, never as a human struggle to understand, to overcome falsity, to stumble toward the truth.

Textbooks, it seems to me, are enemies of education, instruments for promoting dogmatism and trivial learning. They may save the teacher some trouble, but the trouble

they inflict on the minds of the students is a blight and a curse. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 115-116]

7 [N]o textbooks should be used in a liberal arts college ... and formal lectures should be kept to the minimum ... Textbooks are largely devices for enabling students to memorize answers without learning to read or think in the process. Lectures in course are often, too often, nothing more than oral recitations of, or commentaries on, textbook materials. Neither textbooks nor lectures in courses require much activity on the part of the student's mind as opposed to his memory. [Mortimer Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 145-146]

8 Authors are fallible and have distinctive points of view, I reminded my classes. When we lose sight of the person behind the words, we forget that those words can be challenged.

Exactly the same thing happens when students encounter a series of finished products, whether they are books, scientific laws, or ethical precepts. Thus, one solution is to allow them to watch something being written, or proved, or decided, in order to make the activity in question more accessible and less intimidating. Good writing or thinking isn't up there and out of reach, done only by others and handed down to us. Rather, it's something students realize they might be able to do themselves, even if they can't do it all that well yet. [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 38-39]

9 We have built up around the "classics" such an atmosphere of pedantry, we have left them so long to the scholarly dissectors, that we think of them as incomprehensible to the ordinary man to whom they were originally addressed. [Robert M. Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 77, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

10 I can put my difficulty as a teacher as follows: It is impossible to convey that Milton and Keats were for real, that they were about something, that they expected that what they had to say and the way in which they said it made a difference. ... [I]f one goes back more than thirty years, [students] don't have any inkling that these poets were writers and *in* a world. [Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars*, Vintage / Random House, 1964, p. 117]

11 Shakespeare idolatry is easy to trace: it comes from school and it serves ... like a bulwark against all other literature. When you've [read the] "greatest master of dramatic art," you've paid your debt, you've dropped your pinch of incense on the altar of the hall of fame. ...

Shakespeare is only a representative example for the English-speaking world. But everywhere the old-masters feeling is bred by the schools and resented by the pupils. ... Samuel Butler has defined the canonization of books by teachers as "the meanest revenge that dullness can take upon genius," and this is so painfully true that in the life of a teacher who feels not only humble before genius but exhilarated by it, there come moments when he would gladly banish it and its works from the classroom.

This does not come from the fear that "youth will wipe its feet on Milton" but from the fact that in order to acquaint the student with a fine book the teacher must begin by taking all the savor out of it. Imagine the paradox of what might be called the Shakespearean destiny. At one moment in history, *Macbeth* is the latest thing out—a rattling good play—horror, murder, thrills, ghosts, with good poetry thrown in free. It could, should be, and was, described in Hollywood terms. Gradually it becomes last year's success, then old stuff, then quaint old stuff. More time and it rises from its ashes, but transformed into a "text." Scholars peck at it like domestic foul. ... Children are made to feel guilty for failing to remember where the climax comes. In due course, the name "Shakespeare" stands for a consecrated bore, with the odd result that once in a while a good stage performance surprises everybody into feeling that "it isn't so bad after all." [Jacques Barzun, *Teacher In America*, 1945, Liberty Fund, 1981, pp. 209-213]

12 [H]ence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon,

have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books. [Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," 1837, *Selected Essays, Lectures, and Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Pocket Books / Washington Square Press, 1965, pp. 67-68]

13 The conventional teaching of literature and the humanities assumes that literary documents, like natural phenomena in the sciences, lie outside the student's immediate life. They are to be studied and learned in the same way that one might study biology or mathematics, viz., to be comprehended as so much more verbal material concerning the world that lies beyond and independent of the learner. To look at the humanities in this way, the Existentialist educator might say, is to mutilate them and to destroy their most prominent contribution to human learning, namely, the awakening of sensibilities, the intensification of feelings in the individual.

To read the tales of Chaucer's pilgrims, to hear the lines of T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," to study the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson is *not* to be studying English. It is, rather, to be placing one's capacities for feeling at the disposal of an author who seeks to arouse feeling to a new, more intense level of awareness. To study literature is to lay bare the nerve endings of one's emotions and to invite stimulation from the author's work ... [Van Cleve Morris, *Existentialism in Education: What it Means*, 1966, Waveland, 1990, pp. 139-140]

14 The business of education is to give the student both useful information and life-enhancing experience, one largely measurable, the other not; and since the life-enhancing value of a course in literature is difficult to measure—since, moreover, many people in a position to put pressure on education programs have no real experience in or feeling for the arts—it is often tempting to treat life-enhancing courses ... on the same "objective" level as courses in civics, geometry, or elementary physics. So it comes about that books are taught (officially, at least) not because they give joy, the incomparably rich experience we ask and expect of all true art, but because, as a curriculum committee might put it, they "illustrate major themes in American literature," or "present a clearly stated point of view and can thus serve as a vehicle for such curriculum objectives as (1) demonstrating an awareness of the author's purpose, (2) reading critically, and (3) identifying organizational patterns in literary selections used to support a point of view." One cannot exactly say that such teaching is pernicious, but to treat great works

of literature in this way seems a little like arguing for preservation of dolphins, whales, chimps, and gorillas solely on the grounds of ecological balance.

At all levels, not just in the high schools (as above might suggest), novels, short stories, and poems have for years been taught not as experiences that can delight and enliven the soul but as things that are good for us, like vitamin C. The whole idea of the close critical analysis of literary works ... has had the accidental side effect of leading to the notion that the chief virtue of good poetry and fiction is instructional. [John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction*, Vintage, 1985, pp. 40-41]

15 After five years in the public schools, [Jose] could not read ...

By what process did Jose and his schoolbook come together? Is this process part of his reading problem?

Who asks him to read the books? *Someone* asks him. In what sort of voice and for what purpose, and with what concern or lack of concern for the outcome?

And who wrote the book? For whom did they write it? Was it written for Jose? Can Jose actually partake of the life the book seems to offer? ...

Obviously not all of Jose's problems originated in school. But given the intimacy and freedom of the environment at First Street, his school-induced behavior was easy to observe. He could not believe, for instance, that anything contained in books, or mentioned in classrooms, belonged by rights to himself, or even belonged to the world at large, as trees and lampposts belong quite simply to the world we all live in. He believed, on the contrary, that things dealt with in school belonged somehow to school, or were administered by some far-reaching bureaucratic arm. There had been no indication that he could share in them, but rather that he would be measured against them and be found wanting. ... Nor had it ever occurred to him that one might deliberately go about the business of learning something, for he had never witnessed the whole forms of learning. What he had seen was reciting, copying, answering questions, taking tests—and these, alas, do not add up to learning. Nor could he see any connection between school and his life at home and in the streets. [George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School*, 1969, Vintage / Random House, 1970, pp. 75-80]

16 Many students don't really believe in the reality of words that come in books studied in school. ...

I feel students in [my own class, however,] doing with each other's writing the one thing —and a rare thing—that is a precondition for the appreciation and study of literature: taking the words seriously; giving full inner assent to their reality. I phrase the writing assignments as a requirement to "put words on paper such that it's not a waste of time for the reader or the writer." At last students wrestle with the main question—especially in an introductory course: What real value is there in putting words down on paper or in reading them? ... Students came to *enjoy* literature more than they ever have done in a course of mine because this question of whether it's worth putting words on paper at last became the center of the course—and operationally, not intellectually or theoretically. [Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*, Oxford UP, 1986, pp. 74-75]

Related:
– What are the effects of coercion in education?
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?
– Why might young people dislike school?

30. How does "global competition" effect education?

1 In recent years it has been fashionable to define the educational crisis in terms of global competition and minimal competence, as if schools were no more than vocational institutions. ... The classroom, however, should not be merely a trade school. The fundamental task of education in a democracy is what Tocqueville once called the apprenticeship of liberty: learning to be free. I wonder whether Americans still believe liberty has to be learned and that its skills are worth learning. Or have they been deluded by two centuries of rhetoric into thinking that freedom is "natural" and can be taken for granted? [Benjamin R. Barber, "America Skips School," 1993, *The Anteater Reader*, 8th ed., edited by Ray Zimmerman & Carla Copenhaven, Pearson Custom, 2005, pp. 339-340]

2 [W]hat is needed in America—as in most countries of the developed world—is not simply a renewal of the skills that make a country a better competitor in the world markets, but a renewal and reconsideration of what I have called "school culture." ... [When learning] is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative, and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them—we do even better at teaching science, math, and languages in such schools than in more traditional ones. [Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard UP, 1996, pp. 83-84]

3 [J]ust as we shouldn't justify a wonderful curriculum by claiming it will raise standardized test scores—first, because such tests measure what matters least, and second, because claims of this sort serve to legitimize these tests—so we should hesitate to defend or criticize educational practices on economic grounds. ...

Is the main mission of schools really to prepare children to be productive workers who will do their part to increase the profitability of their future employers? Every time education is described as an "investment," or schools are discussed in the context of the "global economy," a loud alarm ought to go off, reminding us of the moral and practical implications of giving an answer in dollars to a question about schools. As Jonathan Kozol recently reminded us, good teachers "refuse to see their pupils as ... pint sized deficits or assets for America's economy into whom they are expected to pump 'added value.'" [Alfie Kohn, *Feel-Bad Education: And Other Contrarian Essays on Children and Schooling*, Beacon, 2011, pp. 152-153]

4 The truth is that school cannot exist without *some* reason for its being, and in fact there are several gods our students are presently asked to serve. ... [E]ach is incapable of sustaining, with richness, seriousness, and durability, the idea of a public school. ...

[T]he first narrative ... may properly go by the name of the god of Economic Utility. ...

The story tells us that we are first and foremost economic creatures, and that our sense of worth and purpose is to be found in our capacity to secure material benefits. ... Goodness inheres in productivity, efficiency, and organization; evil is inefficiency and sloth. ...

The story goes on to preach that America is not so much a culture as it is an economy, and that the vitality of any nation's economy rests on high standards of achievement and rigorous discipline in schools. There is little evidence (that is to say, none) that the productivity of a nation's economy is related to the quality of its schooling. (See the work of Henry Levin of Stanford University.) But every god has unsubstantiated axioms, and most people are content to let this one go unexamined. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, pp. 27-35]

5 [The student] must be taught to amass wealth, but it must be only to increase his power of contribution to the wants and needs of the state. ... Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it. [Benjamin Rush, 1786, signer of the Declaration of Indpendence, planner of Pennsylvania's public schools, quoted by Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 45]

6 The nation is committed to greater advancement in economic growth, and recent research has shown that one of the most beneficial of all such investments is education, accounting for some forty percent of the nation's growth and productivity in recent years. In the new age of science and space, improved education is essential to give meaning to our national purpose and power. It requires skilled manpower and brainpower to match the power of totalitarian discipline. It requires a scientific effort which demonstrates the superiority of freedom. [President John F. Kennedy in a

message to Congress, 1963, quoted by Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 16-17]

7 [C]hildren do not exist for the sake of the nation; they should not be educated for its sake either. Education should make it possible for individuals to become the kind of people they wish to be. It should show them the virtue of thinking and learning. It should expose them to the things that are worthwhile knowing and thinking about. But it should not regard them as cogs in a great national economic machine. That is part of the reason the schools are in the mess they are in. [Sheldon Richman, *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America's Families*, Future of Freedom Foundation, 1995, p. 113]

8 Obsession with national power distorts people's perceptions of the problems youngsters face in schools, and most reform proposals end up by leaving out concern for the quality of children's lives. [Hebert Kohl, *The Herb Kohl Reader: Awakening the Heart of Teaching*, New Press, 2009, p. 294]

9 Writing in between the publications of *A Nation at Risk* [1983] and the statistical reassessments, [Lawrence] Cremin argued that the country's schools were yet again being blamed for a loss of U.S. economic competitiveness when competitiveness is "to a considerable degree a function of monetary, trade, and industrial policy" decided in Washington, DC. "To contend that problems of international competitiveness can be solved by educational reform," Cremin wrote, "especially educational reform defined solely as school reform, is not merely Utopian and millennialist, it is at best foolish and at worst a crass effort to direct attention away from those truly responsible for doing something about competitiveness and to lay the burden on the schools." [*Popular Education and Its Discontents*, Harper and Row, 1989] [Samuel Abrams, *Education and the Commercial Mindset*, Harvard UP, 2016, p. 23]

10 We have repeated to ourselves so much of late the slogan, "America must be strong," that we have forgotten what strength is. We appear to believe that strength consists of masses of men and machines. I do not deny that they have their role. But surely the essential ingredients of strength are trained intelligence, love of country, the understanding of its ideals, and such devotion to those ideals that they become a part of the thought and life of every citizen. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal*

Education, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, p. 61, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

11 Revision of the teaching of science and maths will not help the child much because we are not improving his skills in maths and science in the interest of his inner self but in the interest of war and business. ... The history of American education in the last hundred years, as set forth cogently by my colleague, Professor Callahan, shows that education has not considered the child's interest but that of industry; and I am not yet convinced that what is good for General Motors is good for our children. Even less am I convinced that what is good for Missile Dynamics is good for our children, or what is good for the Pentagon is good for them. [Jules Henry, *Jules Henry on Education*, Vintage / Random House, 1972, p. 23]

12 I am not enough of a nationalist to wish to keep in science the ardent and promising youngsters who leave it, nor even convinced that it would be in the national interest, whatever that may be, to do so. But it does seem to me that the experiences that drive them out have far less to do with the science as either a method or an epistemological system than they do with science as a social institution. Those of our best subjects who left did so because of the way scientists are taught and the way they are used; not because of what science essentially is. After all, it is our respondents who believe that science deals with deep and fundamental issues of being, who are correct. But undergraduates do not get much chance to get down to fundamentals.

It would seem that the sensible way for a nation to retain such youngsters as future scientists and engineers would be to try to improve the way they are taught and to modify the opportunities open to them in their later employment so as to provide a legitimate expectation of personal autonomy in work. But this is not the way our culture is actually going about it. Instead, subject after subject in our study complains that the *way* the high school led him into science confused him and made it much harder for him to see just how his career choice was going to affect his life and his image of himself. From an adolescent, considering what it is he has to do to grow up, this is a very serious charge against secondary education. [Edgar Friedenberg, *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms*, Beacon, 1965, pp. 115-116]

13 [D]espite the long history of poor performance on international assessments of the United States and some other Western nations in comparison to Eastern Asian countries, their economic performance remains strong and competitive (Baker, 2007; Tienken, 2008; Zhao, 2009, 2012, 2014). The lack of a direct link between nations' long-term economic performance and international test scores suggests that what is measured by these assessments—mainly cognitive proficiencies in math, science, and reading—may not be as critical as the noncognitive skills that have been ignored. [Yong Zhao, "The Danger of Misguiding Outcomes: Lessons From Easter Island," *Counting What Counts: Reframing Education Outcomes*, edited by Yong Zhao, Solution Tree, 2016, p. 5]

14 Healthy economies depend on people having good ideas for new businesses and the ability to grow them and create employment. In 2008, IBM published a survey of what characteristics organization leaders need most in their staff. They spoke with fifteen hundred leaders in eighty countries. The two priorities were *adaptability to change* and *creativity in generating new ideas*. They found these qualities lacking in many otherwise highly qualified graduates. Few if any of the abilities that entrepreneurs need are facilitated by the strategies that reformers value so much. On the contrary, standardized education can crush creativity and innovation, the very qualities on which today's economies depend.

Unsurprisingly, as Yong Zhao [director of the Institute for Global and Online Education] points out, there is an inverse relationship between countries that do well on standardized tests and those that demonstrate entrepreneurial flair.

I have mentioned that the top-performing school system according to the latest PISA [Program for International Student Assessment] tables is Shanghai. Shanghai is less impressed by its own performance than everyone else seems to be. Yi Houquin, a high-ranking official in the Shanghai Education Commission, recently said that he was pleased but not surprised at how well their students had done. After all, the system is focused on drilling them in rote learning to succeed in just these sorts of tests. That is not the point. He said that the commission was considering stepping away from PISA testing at some point. "Shanghai does not need so-called '#1 schools.'" he said. "What it needs are schools that follow sound educational principles, respect principles of students' physical and psychological development, and lay a solid foundation for

students' lifelong development." [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 18-19]

15 What price is really being paid by students and teachers in this massive international effort to move up the PISA ranks? South Korea, for example, has ranked in the top five of every PISA program. South Korea spends about $8,200 on each student. This represents almost 8 percent of the country's GDP, the second highest among OECD countries. South Korean parents spend thousands of dollars on after-school tuition. But the real costs of South Korea's high performance on international tests is very much higher; the country now has the highest suicide rate of all industrialized OECD countries.

In the last forty-five years, suicide rates have increased by 60 percent worldwide. Suicide is now among the three leading causes of death among those age fifteen to forty-four. These figures do not include suicide *attempts*, which can be as many as twenty times more frequent than completed suicide. It used to be that the highest suicide rates were among elderly men. Suicide rates among young people have been increasing to such an extent that they are now the group at highest risk in a third of both developed and developing countries. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 23-24]

16 [R]esearch and practical experience show time and time again that the critical factors in raising student achievement on all fronts are the motivation and expectations of students themselves. The best ways to raise them are to improve the quality of teaching, have a rich and balanced curriculum, and have supportive, informative systems of assessment. The political response has been the opposite: to narrow the curriculum and wherever possible to standardize content, teaching, and assessment. It has proved to be the wrong response. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 24-25]

17 Ironically ... our efforts to be protectively pragmatic for the sake of our young have left them *less* equipped to deal with the complexities of today's world. A short-term approach born of anxiety cannot foster the imagination and nerve needed to thrive in a highly dynamic contemporary society. Only a long view, fueled by energetic purposes,

can build and sustain the capacities that will be needed. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, p. 109]

18 Today's education reform movement in many parts of the world resembles the Easter Islanders' race to erect stone statues ... [C]ountries engaged in this reform movement have embarked on a race to produce students with excellent test scores—in the belief that scores in a limited number of subjects on standardized tests accurately represent the quality of education a school provides, the performance of a teacher, and students' ability to succeed in the future—not unlike the chiefs and priests on Easter Island who believed that the statues represented the health and power of their clans, the performance of their members, and promise for a more prosperous future. ...

Ultimately, just like Easter Island ended up a barren island filled with big statues, countries may succeed in raising test scores, but they will likely end up as nation of great test takers in an intellectually barren land; test scores do not count nearly as much as reformers believe for the success of individuals or nations. Moreover, great test scores can come at a huge cost. [Yong Zhao, "The Danger of Misguiding Outcomes: Lessons From Easter Island," *Counting What Counts: Reframing Education Outcomes*, edited by Yong Zhao, Solution Tree, 2016, pp. 2-4]

19 [G]lobal competence is about holding a global perspective in life and work, having the skills and knowledge to live and learn across cultural and national boundaries, and having a positive disposition toward diversity. ...

[The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages] identified five American needs that acquiring global competence can address.

1. Employees who can compete economically in the age of globalization. 2. Agents of diplomacy and national security. 3. Problem solvers for dilemmas larger than nations can tackle in isolation. 4. Inhabitants for a global village that trades discord for harmony. 5. Opportunities for individuals to grow personally. ...

Global competence, like creativity, is an education outcome that has gained increasing recognition, but has not yet been integrated into practices of educational assessment. ... Many efforts have been devoted to the development of the concept and its measures. Next, we need to make global competence part of our expectations of today's schools alongside math and reading. [Michael Thier, "Globally Speaking: Global Competence,"

> *Counting What Counts: Reframing Education Outcomes*, edited by Yong Zhao, Solution Tree, 2016, pp. 117, 128]

Related:
– What is education for? What should the goals of education be?
– Do we really value education? Why do we value it?
– Why is there an imbalance between material progress and psychological progress?

31. Why is there an imbalance between material progress and psychological progress?

1 [T]he future of civilization may depend on finding the solution to psychological problems. It is a truism that man has made great progress in solving many of the material problems of his existence, but that he may well be defeated, and perhaps annihilated, by his failure to solve the *psychological* problems which face him—interpersonal, interracial, and international frictions, delinquency, the disturbances labelled "mental illness," the growing loss of a sense of purpose, and the inability to learn at a rate which will keep up with our expanding knowledge. Thus, the logic of our culture *demands* that the behavioral sciences play an increasingly important part in the foreseeable future of our society as it confronts these problems. [Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*, Charles E. Merrill, 1969, p. 170]

2 Our energies are overwhelmingly directed toward material, scientific, and technical subjects and away from psychological and emotional ones. Much anxiety surrounds the question of how good the next generation will be at math; very little around their abilities at marriage or kindness. We devote inordinate hours to learning about tectonic plates and cloud formations, and relatively few fathoming shame and rage.

The assumption is that emotional insight might be either unnecessary or in essence unteachable, lying beyond reason or method, an unreproducible phenomenon best abandoned to individual instinct and intuition. We are left to find our own path around our unfeasibly complicated minds—a move as striking (and as wise) as suggesting that each generation should rediscover the laws of physics by themselves. [Alain de Botton et al., *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*, The School of Life, 2019, p. 1]

3 [We have] a tradition of education which for centuries has cultivated intellectual virtue at the expense of moral virtue ...

Since a man deficient in moral virtue cannot be expected to appreciate properly the values of intellectual virtue, moral virtue has a fundamental priority in education. ...

[T]he general tradition of education in Europe and America since the Renaissance has neglected or distorted this classical theory of education—first by blurring the clear

distinction between intellectual and moral virtue, and then by ignoring the essential priority of moral virtue, by attempting to inculcate intellectual virtue into minds which have not received the necessary preparation. It is only onto a stock of goodness that knowledge can be safely grafted: by grafting it onto stocks that are unbalanced, undeveloped, neurotic, we merely give power to impulses that may in themselves be evil or corrupted. [Herbert Read, *Education for Peace*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, pp. 133, 112-113, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89306]

4 It is philosophical knowledge, which in the practical order is called morals and politics, that must direct us in intelligent operation toward the right ends. The utility of philosophy is thus superior to that of science, and what is even more obvious, science without moral wisdom—a command of utilities without right direction—is a dangerous thing. The more science we have, the more we are in need of wisdom to prevent its misuse. The imminent tragedy of the contemporary world is written in the fact that positivistic modern culture has magnified science and almost completely emancipated itself from wisdom. [Mortimer Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 73]

5 Shall we tell our children that one thing is as good as another—here a bit of physics, and there a bit of knowledge of literature? ...

[W]e turn to the humanities to obtain a clear view of the large and vital ideas of our age. Even in the humanities we may get bogged down in a mass of specialized scholarship, furnishing our minds with lots of small ideas just as unsuitable as the ideas which we might pick up from the natural sciences. But we may also be more fortunate (if fortunate it is) and find a teacher who will "clear our minds," clarify the ideas—the "large" and universal ideas already existent in our minds—and thus make the world intelligible for us. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, pp. 92, 95-96]

6 The object of educational systems the world over is not to gain wisdom but to gain riches and power. The effect of these systems is, therefore, to accelerate technical change without thought of its social consequences ...

Education cannot come into its own in any country unless the culture of that country has the same aim as education. If the aim of the society is to gain prosperity and power through the use of technology, the consequences must be as Jacques Ellul sees them:

" ... education will no longer be an unpredictable and exciting adventure in human enlightenment, but an exercise in conformity and an apprenticeship to whatever gadgetry is useful in a technical world." [*The Technological Society*, 1964] [Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, pp. 37-39]

7 Science and engineering produce "know-how"; but "know-how" is nothing by itself; it is a means without an end, a mere potentiality, an unfinished sentence. ... Can education help us to finish the sentence, to turn the potentiality into a reality to the benefit of man?

To do so, the task of education would be, first and foremost, the transmission of ideas of value, of what to do with our lives. There is no doubt also the need to transmit know-how but this must take second place, for it is obviously somewhat foolhardy to put great powers into the hands of people without making sure that they have a reasonable idea of what to do with them. At present, there can be little doubt that the whole of mankind is in mortal danger, not because we are short of scientific and technological know-how, but because we tend to use it destructively, without wisdom. More education can help us only if it produces more wisdom. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, pp. 86-87]

8 [T]he crucial difficulty with which we are confronted lies in the fact that the development of man's intellectual capacities has far outstripped the development of his emotions. Man's brain lives in the twentieth century; the heart of most men lives still in the Stone Age. The majority of men have not yet acquired the maturity to be independent, to be rational, to be objective. They need myths and idols to endure the fact that man is all by himself, that there is no authority which gives meaning to life except man himself. [Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, 1941, Henry Holt and Co., 1994, p. xvi]

9 While we are congratulating ourselves upon the well disciplined habits which the pupil is acquiring, judged by his ability to reproduce a lesson when called upon, we forget to commiserate ourselves because the deeper intellectual and moral nature of the child has

secured absolutely no discipline at all, but has been left to follow its own caprices, the disordered suggestions of the moment, or of past experience. ... I do not think it would be well for us to have to face the actual psychological condition of the majority of the pupils that leave our schools. We should find this division of attention and the resulting disintegration so great that we might be discouraged from all future endeavor. None the less, it is well for us to recognize that this state of things exists, and that it is the inevitable outcome of those conditions which require the simulation of attention without requiring its essence. [John Dewey, "Interest in Relation to Training of the Will," 1896, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, pp. 266-267]

10 [M]any patients expect to finish their analysis in no time because they are so intelligent. But the progress in analysis has little to do with intelligence. The reasoning powers which these people have may, in fact, be used to obstruct progress. What counts are the emotional forces operating in the patients, their capacity to be straight and to assume responsibility for themselves. [Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, 1950, W. W. Norton and Co., 1991, p. 66]

11 [H]ardly any of the people who have such enormous influence on our culture have ever been in a school that made sure they thought about these issues [virtue and *the Good*]. Most of the members of today's elite are ethically illiterate. They are not bad people. They are not indifferent. They have done as well as most human beings do when they try to think through questions involving virtue and happiness unaided. The problem is that they have been given no help in tapping the magnificent body of thought on these issues that *Homo sapiens* has already produced. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 126-127]

12 To determine the good and the order of goods is the prime object of all moral and political education. We cannot hope that one who has never confronted these issues can be either a good citizen or a good man. ... An educational system which does not make these questions the center of its attention is not an educational system at all. It is a large-scale housing venture. It may be effective in keeping young people out of worse places until they can go to work. It cannot contribute to the growth of free minds. It cannot help the rising generation solve the great problem of our time.

The great problem of our time is moral, intellectual, and spiritual. With a superfluity of goods we are sinking into poverty. With a multitude of gadgets we are no happier than we were before. With a declining death rate we have yet to discover what to do with our lives. With a hatred of war we are now deeply engaged in the greatest war in history. With a love of liberty we see much of the world in chains.

How can these things be? They can be because we have directed our lives and our education to means instead of ends. We have been concerned with the transitory and superficial instead of the enduring and basic problems of life and of society. [Robert Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 91-92, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

13 Vocational education conceived as job-training represents the greatest threat to democratic education in our time. It is a threat to democracy because it tends to make the job-trained individual conscious only of his technological responsibilities, but not of his social and moral responsibilities. He becomes a specialist in "means" but indifferent to "ends" which are considered the province of another specialist. The main concern is with "getting a job" and after that with "doing a job" no matter what the political direction and moral implications of the job are. ...

[L]iberal and vocational education [should be related] in such a way that no matter how a man earns his living he will not lose sight of the communal traditions to which he owes his knowledge and skills, the communal responsibilities he shares with his fellows, and the communal tasks to which he can make his distinctive contribution. Vocational education which fails to do this is illiberal and had best be abandoned. [Sidney Hook, *Education for Modern Man: A New Perspective*, 1946, revised 1963, Wipf and Stock, 2019, pp. 201, 212]

14 The development of production and the acquisition of wealth have thus become the highest goals of the modern world in relation to which all other goals, no matter how much lip-service may still be paid to them, have come to take second place. ...

This is the philosophy of materialism, and it is this philosophy—or metaphysic—which is now being challenged by events. ...

Needless to say, wealth, education, research, and many other things are needed for any civilisation, but what is most needed today is a revision of the ends which these means

> are meant to serve. And this implies, above all else, the development of a life-style which accords to material things their proper, legitimate place, which is secondary and not primary. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, pp. 313-315]

15 > Regardless of where I begin my thinking about the problems facing our civilization, I always return to the theme of human responsibility, which seems incapable of keeping pace with civilization and preventing it from turning against the human race. ... The main task for the coming era is something else: a radical renewal of our sense of responsibility. Our conscience must catch up to our reason; otherwise we are lost. [Václav Havel, Commencement address, Harvard University, 1995, quoted by Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*, 1999, Simon & Schuster, 2021, p. 251]

Related:
– Do we really value education? Why do we value it?
– What do we teach via our character and the environments we create?
– What is education for? What should the goals of education be?

32. What is "signaling" and why is it an important concept in education?

1 Typical students burn thousands of hours studying material that neither raises their productivity nor enriches their lives. ...

[W]hy [then] do employers bid so lavishly for educated labor? ...

The answer is a single word I seek to burn into your mind: *signaling*. Even if what a student learned in school is utterly useless, employers will happily pay extra if their scholastic achievement provides *information about their productivity*. ... Your educational record reveals much about your ability and character. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 1-3]

2 [D]espite the chasm between what students learn and what workers do, academic success is a strong *signal* of worker productivity. The labor market doesn't pay you for the useless subjects you master; it pays you for the preexisting traits you reveal by mastering them. ...

Practical relevance makes little difference ... [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 13-14]

3 "From the standpoint of most teachers, right up to and including the level of teachers of college undergraduates, the ideal student is well behaved, unaggressive, docile, patient, meticulous, and empathetic in the sense of intuiting the response to the teacher that is most likely to please the teacher." [Richard Posner, "The New Gender Gap in Education"] ...

[E]ducation signals not just intelligence, but conscientiousness—the student's discipline, work ethic, commitment to quality, and so forth. ...

[E]ducation also signals conformity—the worker's grasp of and submission to social expectations.

Actually, that's an understatement. In our society, educational achievement *is* a social expectation. Model workers are supposed to pursue and obtain traditional credentials ...

The road to academic success is paved with the trinity of intelligence, conscientiousness, and conformity. The stronger your academic record, the greater employers' confidence you have the whole package.

Why do employers seek this package? Because the road to academic success and the road to job success are paved with the same materials. ... If you lack the right stuff to succeed in school, you probably lack the right stuff to succeed in the labor market. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 10, 16-18]

4 [This book] claims ... at least one-third of student's time in school [and the financial reward students enjoy] is signaling. ...

Personally, I think the true fraction exceeds 50%. Probably more like 80%. ... [W]hen you reflect on your firsthand experience with school and work, one-third signaling is the lowest share you can plausibly maintain. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 4-5]

5 "Why education pays" is a thorny real-world issue, not a calculus problem. And to repeat, this book claims that "education is mostly signaling," never "education is all signaling." Its verdict rests on a package of arguments, all of which suggest education as we know it is *closer* to pure signaling than to pure human capital. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 118]

6 The amount of education you need to *get* a job really has risen more than the amount of education you need to *do* a job. ...

In our society, education is a seal of approval. Employers know it. Workers know it. As seals proliferate, workers need extra seals to upstage the competition. You'll never apply most of what you study, but so what? Academic success opens doors. A dysfunctional game, but if you refuse to play, the labor market brands you a loser. [Bryan Caplan, *The*

Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 108]

7 For some jobs, the economic premium for a degree is produced by the actual education that has gone into getting the degree. Lawyers, physicians, and engineers can earn their high incomes only by deploying knowledge and skills that take years to acquire, and degrees in law, medicine, and engineering still signify competence in those knowledges and skills. But for many other jobs, the economic premium for the BA is created by a brutal fact of life about the American job market: Employers do not even interview applicants who do not hold a BA. Even more brutal, the advantage conferred by the BA often has nothing to do with content of the education. Employers do not value what the student learned, just that the student has a degree.

Employers value the BA because it is a no-cost (for them) screening device for academic ability and perseverance. The more people who go to college, the more sense it makes for employers to require a BA. ... Knowing this, large numbers of students are in college to buy their admission ticket—the BA. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 92]

8 If teachers were honest with ourselves, we would be slower to self-congratulate. Do we really *transform* waiters into economic consultants—or merely *evaluate* whether waiters have the right stuff to be economic consultants?

By analogy, both sculptors and appraisers have the power to raise the market value of a piece of stone. The sculptor raises the market value of a piece of stone by *shaping it*. The appraiser raises the market value of a piece of stone by *judging it*. Teachers need to ask ourselves, "How much of what we do is sculpting, and how much is appraising?" And if we won't ask ourselves, our alumni need to ask for us. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 30]

9 Education definitely *can* be good for the soul. But that hardly shows actually existing education achieves this noble end. In practice, education often turns out to be a neglectful or abusive mother rather than a nourishing one. ...

To be a worthwhile end-in-itself … education must meet higher standards. To plausibly qualify as a merit good, it needs three ingredients.

[W]orthy content. Learning about great ideas and glorious culture uplifts the soul. …

[S]killful pedagogy. Learning from enthusiastic teachers who have mastered their subjects uplifts the soul. …

[E]ager students. … Force-feeding great ideas and glorious culture to students who couldn't care less [does not uplift their souls]. Indeed, the charade degrades students, teachers, and the subjects themselves. …

How does actually existing education measure up against these standards of merit? As long as you've had a vaguely typical education, you already know the answer. The content of education is mixed at best: pockets of greatness, surrounded by insipid busywork. The pedagogy is poor: frankly, most teachers are boring. The students are worse: no matter how great their teachers, few yearn for the life of the mind. … Harvard University's Steven Pinker sadly reports that the best students in the world yawn at the best teachers in the world:

"A few weeks into every semester, I face a lecture hall that is half-empty, despite the fact that I am repeatedly voted a Harvard Yearbook Favorite Professor, that the lectures are not video-recorded, and that they are the only source of certain material that will be on the exam. I don't take it personally; it's common knowledge that Harvard students stay away from lectures in droves, burning a fifty-dollar bill from their parents' wallets every time they do." ["The Trouble With Harvard", 2014] [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 240-241]

10 What makes vocational ed's social return so ample? Status is zero-sum; skill is not. Conventional education mostly helps students by raising their status, but average status cannot rise. Vocational education mostly helps students by building their skills—and average skill *can* rise. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 229]

11 Popular support for education subsidies rests on the [fallacy of composition]. The person who gets more education, gets a better job. It works, you see it plainly. Yet it does

not follow that if everyone gets more education, everyone gets a better job. In the signaling model, subsidizing everyone's schooling to improve our jobs is like urging everyone to stand up at a concert to improve our views. Both are "smart for one, dumb for all." [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 5-6]

12 It is tempting to infer the major premium is all about skills: signaling may explain why fine arts majors earn more than high school grads, but human capital explains why engineers earn more than dance majors.

On inspection, however, the skill acquisition story is overrated. About three-quarters of STEM majors—and half of engineers—end up in jobs that *don't* use their specialized training. STEM degrees impress a wide swath of employers, opening doors to careers in not only technology, but finance and business. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 190]

13 There are many good reasons for gaining academic qualifications. The process should be inherently worthwhile and the best programs are. But academic qualifications are also a form of currency: they have an exchange rate in the market place for jobs or higher education. Like all currencies, their value can go up or down according to market conditions and how much currency is in circulation. University degrees used to have a high market value in part because relatively few people had them. The growth in population combined with the expansion of professional and administrative work means that unprecedented numbers of people are now going to college. ...

As a result, the market value of degrees is tumbling. Something more is needed to edge ahead of the crowd ...

The current assumption is that by expanding education and raising standards all will be well. The end game assumes that when everyone has a PhD, there will be a return to full employment. But there won't. The markets will reconfigure as the currency rates fall and employers will look for something else. They are doing this already. The issue is not that academic standards are falling. The real issue is that the very foundations upon which our current systems of education are built are shifting beneath our feet. [Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds: The Power of Being Creative*, Capstone, 2011, pp. 51-53]

14 [Now] you have to do it all: get A's in all your classes, compete for leadership positions, pile up the extracurriculars—be a Super Person. ...

The main thing that's driving the madness is simply the madness itself. "The resume arms race," as it is invariably called, is just like the nuclear one. The only point of having more is having more than everybody else. ... Nobody needs eleven extracurriculars ... unless the other guy has ten. ...

The system, it should be said, goes well beyond the most prestigious schools ... [T]he mania exists, albeit at lower temperatures, at a much larger pool of institutions. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 39-40]

15 We have to admit academic success is a great way to *get* a good job, but a poor way to learn how to *do* a good job. If everyone got a college degree, the result would not be great jobs for all, but runaway credential inflation. Trying to spread success with education spreads education but not success. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 289]

Related:
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?
– Do we really value education? Why do we value it?
– What is the reality of the university?

33. How does our culture view college and vocational choices? How does this effect our systems of education?

1 One of the major challenges keeping young people from developing a healthy sense of control is their narrow and distorted views of the adult world and what it takes to be successful and have a satisfying life ... These views foster fear and competition. They affect high-achieving kids, for whom a rigid view of the path to success creates unnecessary stress, anxiety, and mental health problems, and low-achieving kids, many of whom conclude at a young age that they will never be successful, so why try at all. ...

The reality is that we become successful in this world by working hard at something that comes easily to us and that engages us. We need to tell our kids that the skill set required to be a successful student is, in many ways, very different from the skill set that will lead you to have a successful career and a good life. ...

We need to assure kids that the majority of successful people were not straight-A students. ... Ability is not a simple matter of grades.

Don't misunderstand us: being a good student and getting a degree from an elite college clearly have their benefits, but there are alternative paths. Focusing all our attention on just one path will make a lot of kids feel left out. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 304-305]

2 "The forgotten half" is a term used in educational circles to refer to those who are work-bound after high school, not college-bound. If we include everyone who drops out of college or community college without a degree, that number is closer to two-thirds. The current system makes life as difficult for them as it possibly can. ...

[M]ost guidance counselors now see their role as encouraging everyone to go to college —a four-year college if possible, a community college for those with the weakest academic records. Too few counselors tell work-bound high-school students how much money crane operators or stonemasons make compared to people who deliver pizza or sell shoes. Too few tell them about the new technical specialties that are being produced by a changing job market, and how much they pay. Too few assess the non-academic

abilities of work-bound students and direct them toward occupations in which they can reasonably expect to succeed. ...

Large numbers of students who have neither the interest nor the ability to succeed in the academic track are in it anyway, sometimes dropping out, sometimes stumbling through to the high-school diploma, never having acquired the assets that CTE (career and technical education) could have provided. The culprit is the misbegotten, pernicious, wrongheaded idea that not going to college means you're a failure. It deforms the behavior of all the actors in America's high schools—principals, teachers, guidance counselors, students, and parents. ...

[T]he problems created by shortfalls in CTE funding and facilities are minor compared with the problem created by disdain. Choices to not attend college or to drop out of college and go to work need our understanding and—this is imperative—our respect. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 147-150]

3 Most people don't have a university degree. In the U.S. nearly two thirds do not. ... So it's folly to create an economy that makes a university diploma a necessary condition of dignified work and a decent life. Elites have, during this period, so valorized a university degree both as an avenue for advancement and as a basis for social esteem ... that they have difficulty understanding the hubris a meritocracy can generate. And they miss the harsh judgment it imposes on those who haven't gone to university. ... This harsh judgment is precisely what accounts for much of the anger and resentment and sense of grievance, among working people against elites, that fueled the populist backlash ...

Broadly speaking, we should focus less on arming people for meritocratic competition, and focus more on affirming the dignity of work. We should ask what policies will ensure that those who don't have advanced degrees or fancy credentials, those who don't inhabit the privileged ranks of the professional classes, can find work that enables them to support a family, contribute to their community, and win social recognition for doing so. ...

It's important to broaden access to higher education for those who can't afford it. But it's also important to lower the stakes of the frenzied competition to get it. And this means investing more ... in those forms of learning that most people rely on to prepare themselves for the world of work and of citizenship. ... promoting, funding, and

honoring vocational and technical training and apprenticeships. The failure of many of our societies to do this not only constricts economic opportunity for those who don't aspire to a university degree, it also reflects the meritocratic priorities (I would say the credentialist prejudices) of those who govern. [Michael Sandel, "The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Geneva Graduate Institute, 27 Sept. 2022, 41:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_rUeUM2HIQ]

4 Our communities depend on an enormous diversity of talents, roles, and occupations. The work of electricians, builders, plumbers, chefs, paramedics, carpenters, mechanics, engineers, security staff, and all the rest (who may or may not have college degrees) is absolutely vital to the quality of each of our lives. Very many people in these occupations enjoy them enormously and gain great fulfillment from them. One effect of the emphasis on academic work in schools is that the education system is not focused on these roles and typically considers them second-rate options for people who don't make the academic cut.

As the story goes, the smart kids go to college. The others may leave school early and look for a job or apply for a vocational course to learn a trade of some sort. Either way, they have taken a step down the status ladder in education. This academic/vocational caste system is one of the most corrosive problems in education. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, p. 17]

5 [O]ur country has become emotionally disconnected from an essential part of our workforce. ...

Even as unemployment remains sky high, a whole category of vital occupations has fallen out of favor, and companies struggle to find workers with the necessary skills. The causes seem clear. We have embraced a ridiculously narrow view of education. Any kind of training or study that does not come with a four-year degree is now deemed 'alternative.' Many viable careers once aspired to are now seen as 'vocational consolation prizes,' and many of the jobs this current administration has tried to 'create' over the last four years are the same jobs that parents and teachers actively discourage kids from pursuing. [Mike Rowe, "The First Four Years Are the Hardest," 2012, quoted by Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, p. 236]

6 Everyone can find a place for herself or himself if allowed the time to explore the possibilities and if there is access to decent and loving advice. There are some high school guidance counselors who can also be helpful, but in my experience the advice that comes from the high school usually depends upon school performance rather than an intimate knowledge of young people's dreams and aspirations. "Good" students are channeled in one way, "bad" ones in others. ...

The fact is, school counseling is usually cold and mechanical. Students are rarely encouraged to try things that their grades don't seem to qualify them for. Yet motivation often counts for more than grades, and young people who have a direction, and have some support, can usually get where they want to go with or without good grades. The problem is that often high school counselors are a burdened species. There are usually too few of them at a school to spend time knowing the individual needs and aspirations of all the students. ... However, the rare counselor who cares is like a member of the family, and should be part of the student's support network as early as possible in his or her high school career. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, p. 24]

7 It is easy to put a dollar value on education and say that a fancy college is worth more than cooking school, that law school is worth more than art school, that medical school is worth more than cabinetmaking school. This way of placing value on work is characteristic of people in my generation in our society. We are the ones who have made it through college and have too often turned away from the value of labor that our grandparents had. Yet often our children see a bigger world, one in which many forms of work lead to dignity and in which the financial rewards of work are less important than the personal and spiritual rewards.

It is important to support the dreams of young people and be with them when they explore what is one of the most essential aspects of their existence: the choice of a vocation. Getting a good job in the hope of doing something satisfying with the money and time one earns by becoming rich is foolish. Becoming rich is a gamble itself, and staying healthy while struggling to succeed is even chancier. A full but modest life dedicated to meaningful work makes more sense. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, p. 34]

8 I've been working with many young people who have chosen routes to lifetime vocations that do not involve going to college right after high school. These youngsters are not dropouts, or school problems. In fact, most of them are at or near the top of their classes, are engaged in extracurricular activities such as the student council, the school paper, and the band. Some are athletes, and others are involved in art, music, dance, or computer science. These young people decided not to go straight to college after high school, but to work or travel instead, and consider college only if it fit into the larger scheme of what they wanted to do with their lives. ... They refused to rush off to college or center their lives around preparing for well-paying, high-status jobs. In fact, money and status were less important to them than the quality of their lives and the usefulness of the work they did. Many of these youngsters were accused, by their parents and teachers, of being romantic and unrealistic, of not knowing how hard and difficult survival is in our society. Yet it's possible that they are more realistic and sensible than youngsters who force themselves through college in order to prepare themselves to "go out into the world" ready to compete, make money, and wait until retirement to enjoy themselves. There are many good reasons to encourage young people to live modest, socially useful, and personally rewarding lives and avoid the neuroticism and violence that accompanies a single-minded quest for money and status. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, pp. 4-5]

9 There are valuable things that can be learned at colleges, both culturally and technically, and professions that can only be learned there. For some people college can open up unimaginable possibilities and change the whole nature and direction of their lives. However, this isn't true for everyone, and one ought to consider what other useful things there are for young people to do right after high school. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, p. 8]

10 For the most part education systems ... are organized on the false assumptions that life is linear and inorganic. The conventional story is that you study particular disciplines and stay with the prescribed program, and pass all the tests, your life will fall neatly into place. If you don't, it won't.

Well, it might work that way, according to how sure you are of what you want to do. Then again, it might not. For example, there is often no direct relationship between

what you study in school and the work you do when you leave ... [Katherine Brooks, director of Liberal Arts Career services at the University of Texas at Austin] estimates that less than a third of the alumni who stay in touch with her are in careers that are directly related to their college studies. [Ken Robinson, *Finding Your Element: How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life*, Viking / Penguin, 2013, pp. 27-29]

11 [T]here is an overarching consideration so important it is hard to express adequately: the satisfaction of being good at what one does for a living (and knowing it), compared to the melancholy of being mediocre at what one does for a living (and knowing it). This is another truth about living a human life that a seventeen-year-old might not yet understand on his own, but that a guidance counselor can bring to his attention.

Guidance counselors and parents who automatically encourage young people to go to college straight out of high school regardless of their skills and interests are being thoughtless about the best interests of young people in their charge. Even for students who have the academic ability to succeed in college, going directly to college may be a bad way for them to discover who they are and how they should make a living. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 96]

12 The income for the top people in a wide variety of occupations that do not require a college degree is higher than the average income for many occupations that require a BA. Furthermore, the range and number of such jobs is expanding rapidly. ... The increase in wealth in American society has increased the demand for all sorts of craftsmanship. ... There has never been a time in history when people with skills not taught in college have been in so much demand at such high pay as today, nor a time when the range of such jobs has been so wide. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 94-95]

13 [Federal Reserve Bank of New York researchers] noted in 2019 that average college graduates with no graduate degree earned about $78,000 per year—$33,000 more than someone with just a high school diploma. ...

Now for the throat clearing and caveats, which should give some of you a bit of pause. Averages are just that, and the tidy story they tell can often mask trouble. ... Finishing

[college] in a timely fashion makes an enormous difference ... both because the extra time in school costs money and because of the opportunity cost if you are not in the workforce for that extra year or two.

Much also depends on your major. ... Most science, technology, engineering, or math majors are very likely to achieve a positive return on their investment, but arts or humanities majors who attend private colleges with average costs have only a 50 percent or so chance ...

[This report] is quick to remind readers that [it] examined only earnings—not the value of the friends or contacts students make, the higher household income that might result from a spouse they might meet in college, or the overall feelings of well-being and life satisfaction that may result from higher education. Also, [it] doesn't necessarily want people who are passionate about particular subjects to switch away from those majors. Researchers ... don't have a good way to know what would happen if students who love literature switched to engineering just because they thought they were supposed to. Would another $2 million come their way? Even if it did, would it be worth it if they were miserable at work?

And then there's this: A full 25 percent of people who graduate from college do not earn more than those who completed only high school, according to a 2014 New York Fed report. ... But ... college pays off more for people from higher-income families. [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, HarperCollins, 2021, pp. 233-235]

14 Jacob Mincer of the National Bureau of Economic Research and Columbia University states flatly that of "20 to 30 percent of students at any level, the additional schooling has been a waste, at least in terms of earnings." College fails to work its income-raising magic for almost a third of those who go. More than half of those people in 1972 who earned $15,000 or more reached that comfortable bracket without the benefit of a college education. Jencks says that financial success in the U.S. depends on a good deal of luck, and the most sophisticated regression analyses have yet to demonstrate otherwise. [Caroline Bird, "College is a Waste of Time and Money," *The Case Against College*, David McKay Co., 1975, https://www.scribd.com/document/46775622/Caroline-Bird-College-is-a-Waste-of-Time-and-Money]

15 Psychic income is primarily what students mean when they talk about getting a good job. During the most affluent years of the late 1960s and 1970s college students told their placement officers that they wanted to be researchers, college professors, artists, city planners, social workers, poets, book publishers, archeologists, ballet dancers, or authors. ...

But colleges fail to warn students that jobs of these kinds are hard to come by, even for qualified applicants, and they rarely accept the responsibility of helping students choose a career that will lead to a job. When a young person says he is interested in helping people, his counselor tells him to become a psychologist. But jobs in psychology are scarce. The Department of Labor, for instance, estimates there will be 4,300 new jobs for psychologists in 1975 while colleges are expected to turn out 58,430 B.A.s in psychology that year. ...

The outlook isn't much better for students majoring in other psychic-pay disciplines: sociology, English, journalism, anthropology, forestry, education. Whatever college graduates want to do, most of them are going to wind up doing what there is to do. [Caroline Bird, "College is a Waste of Time and Money," *The Case Against College*, David McKay Co., 1975, https://www.scribd.com/document/46775622/Caroline-Bird-College-is-a-Waste-of-Time-and-Money]

16 Perhaps the biggest and most damaging myth confronting students and parents who are choosing a college is that a "big-name" institution is a prerequisite or an assurance of a top quality education and/or a successful career afterwards. ...

Top colleges turn out extraordinary graduates because they take in extraordinary freshmen. That tells very little about what happened in the intervening four years, except that it did not ruin these individuals completely. It tells even less about what would have happened if these same extraordinary people had been educated elsewhere. ...

All this is not to suggest that there are no differences in academic quality between institutions. There are in fact vast differences—but big names are not a reliable guide to those differences. Those big names are often a result of faculty research activity, whose effects on undergraduate teaching are at best questionable. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 106-107]

17 Let's start with some of the myths about raising a successful child that have come to resemble gospel. ...

Attending a prestigious school gives kids added advantages in life: ... [A] comparative study [was done] of students accepted at Yale who actually attended the school and those who were accepted but ended up going to less prestigious schools for family or financial reasons. Down the road, they found no difference in job advancement or pay between these two groups. ... Bright, hardworking kids tend to do well regardless of the school they attend.

Yes, but won't my child get to make connections at prestigious schools that will open doors in the future? ... The issue isn't whether prestigious schools offer tickets to opportunity. They often do. The issue is the price you are willing to have your child pay for these tickets. There are kids who belong at the most prestigious schools in the country and who find their way in through a combination of academic talent, hard work, and a bit of good fortune. But there are other kids who give up their childhood, their integrity, their health, and their psychological stability to get into these schools. In spite of parents' rationalization that "they'll thank me down the line," very few of these kids will. [Madeline Levine, *Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success*, HarperCollins, 2012, pp. 15-17]

18 [W]here you go to college does not make an enormous difference to your success in life. ... Researchers Stacy Berg Dale and Alan Krueger have followed the career trajectories of the same class of high school graduates for decades. Among students who had comparable SAT scores, whether or not they went to an elite college made little difference in their earning potential. ... Another study from Gallup and Purdue University found that the type of college students attended (e.g., public versus private; highly selective versus less selective) made very little difference to their workplace engagement and well-being. The factors that best predicted well-being were those more intrinsic to the college experience itself, such as: 1) having a professor who showed personal interest in them, stimulated them to learn, and encouraged them; 2) having an internship or job in college that allowed them to apply what they were learning; and 3) being actively involved in extracurricular activities or projects that took a semester or more to complete. ... What these studies suggest is that if you're bright and motivated, it doesn't much matter where you go to school. For some kids, knowing this makes it a bit easier to pay attention to what's really important to them. [William Stixrud and Ned

Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 130-131]

19 Although it is true that the single best predictor of lifetime income is the number of years completed in school, it is also the case that this relationship does not necessarily depend on where one's schooling was obtained (Berg, Bibb, Finegan, Swafford, 1981). ... Nor is institutional prestige a good predictor of later on-the-job satisfaction; neither does it predict well one's effectiveness on the job as rated by supervisors. ...

A second kind of reassurance—a reminder, actually—is that a successful occupational career depends not only on the number of years one spends in school, but also on the reasons for learning. Recall that students who perceive school as an opportunity to better themselves are more likely to persist longer, whereas those who see school as a way to bolster a sense of worth by outscoring others are likely to quit sooner (e.g., Nicholls et al., 1985). Given the importance of motivational factors in the decision to continue in school, parents often fear the wrong thing. ... What matters ultimately is not performance but learning; not short-term gains but the reasons for achieving. If the reasons are right, achievement will likely flourish without the goad of competition. Otherwise, children may do just enough to win the prize and little more. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 235-251]

20 When we ask high school principals and independent school heads, "Why don't you just tell kids the truth about college? That where you go makes very little difference in later life and isn't a predictor of success?" they consistently say, "If we did that, we would get angry calls and letters from parents who believe that if their children understood the truth, they would not work hard in school and would fail in life."

We have found that simply telling kids the truth about the world—including the advantages of being a good student—increases their flexibility and drive. It motivates unmotivated kids to shift the emphasis from "Here are the hoops I will have to jump through to be successful" to "Here are some of the ways I can choose to develop myself in order to make an important contribution to this world." [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 309]

21 There are many reasons why adolescents might not be ready to go to college right after high school. They may lack the adequate academic skills. They may lack self-awareness or self-regulation skills, or struggle with anxiety or depression. They may not be ready to manage the details of living independently. Or they may be burned out from four years of going pedal to the metal in high school. They may be prone to social isolation. Or their brains simply may not be developed enough. Remember, just as kids develop physically at different rates, the same is true of their brains. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 293]

22 "As anyone who has ever taught high school will attest, even among teens who attend the very best high schools, many simply hate school. They have never done well in school, see no relevance in it, never do assignments, and habitually cut classes or are truant. ... Why do policy makers seem to want to deny the existence of students who exhibit these attitudes and behaviors? ...

"Career and Technical Education is to some students what Advanced Placement and honors courses are to others." [Kenneth Gray, "Is High School Career and Technical Education Obsolete?"] ...

Vocational students are typically "academic underachievers" *before* entering the vocational track. The right metric isn't, "How do vocational students compare to average students?" but rather, "How do vocational students compare to *comparable* students who didn't study a trade?" Vocational ed fares well by this metric. It raises pay more than academic coursework. It reduces unemployment more than academic coursework. It even boosts high school graduation: the academically uninclined are less prone to quit school when they don't detest all their classes. Vocational education even seems to deter crime. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 225-227]

23 To say that no more than 20 percent of all students have the academic ability to deal with college-level material seems to be false on its face, since the number of BAs awarded in 2005 amounted to 35 percent of all twenty-three-year-olds (I will use *BA* as shorthand for all bachelor's degrees and *college* as shorthand for four-year residential colleges or universities). It is also contradicted by studies of college readiness that say higher

percentages of students, as many as 65 percent of high school graduates, are qualified for admission to a four-year college.

This brings us to a distinction that you should keep in mind: ... I am asking how many high school graduates can cope with college-level material in the core disciplines of the arts and sciences, not how many can survive four years at today's colleges and walk away with diplomas. If surviving to a diploma is the definition of "cope with college-level material," then almost anyone can do it if he shops for easy courses in an easy major at an easy college. But as soon as we focus on college-level material traditionally defined, the requirements become stringent. ...

How many of America's seventeen-year-olds can meet the benchmarks? Three independent methods of calculating the answer to that question, described in the notes, lead to an estimate of 9 to 12 percent, with a realistic best-guess of about 10 percent.

So few can do well in real colleges because real college-level material is hard. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 68-70]

24 [I]n this country [the bachelor's degree] is recognized and honored as something everybody should have if he can scrape up the money to get it. This is just the trouble with it. Since it is conferred at the wrong point for the wrong reasons, it induces students to remain in college till the wrong point for the wrong reasons. ...

Their presence gives the colleges the reputation of kindergartens and country clubs. It interferes with the education of those who are trying to get an education. It confuses the aims and functions of the higher learning. And the country is deprived of the useful work these young people might be doing instead of wasting their time in "college life." [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, p. 75, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

25 For most of the twentieth century, the United States stood alone in the quality of its higher-education system and the percentage of its young people who successfully passed through that system. ...

During those years, "upward mobility with regard to education characterized American society," wrote [Harvard economists Claudia] Goldin and [Lawrence] Katz. "Each

generation of Americans achieved a level of education that greatly exceeded that of the previous one." But now that progress has stopped, or at least stalled, and the nation's higher-education system has ceased to be the instrument of social mobility and growing equality that it was for so much of the twentieth century. [Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, pp. 148-149]

26 College is a bet, but so is avoiding it outright—a big one at that. And though all of us are right to wonder if our kids have what it takes not to end up among the college graduates who don't earn more than high school graduates do, the opposite question is necessary, too: If they don't graduate from college, what are the odds that they'll be among the small percentage of people who make it—who start a business or find a trade that will always be in demand? And if they don't outearn the average college graduate—if they never do or never come close—will they be happy about that?

In his book on adjunct professors, *The Adjunct Underclass*, Herb Childress takes a somewhat cynical view of all of this. There is no wage premium for college graduates, he writes; just a wage defense. A college degree is "indispensable employment insurance," nothing more and nothing less, although it may cost somewhat more at private universities. If he's right, we can ask ourselves this: How comfortable are we when we go without insurance in other parts of our lives? [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, Harper Collins, 2021, pp. 239]

Related:
– How are young people prepared for the world of work?
– What is the proper function of the university?
– What is the reality of the university?
– Strategies for Cultivating Vocation

34. What is the proper function of the university?

1 The characteristic gift of a university is the gift of an interval. Here is an opportunity to put aside the hot allegiances of youth without the necessity of at once acquiring new loyalties to take their place. Here is a break in the tyrannical course of irreparable events; a period in which to look round upon the world and upon oneself without the sense of an enemy at one's back or the insistent pressure to make up one's mind; a moment in which to taste the mystery without the necessity of at once seeking a solution. And all this, not in an intellectual vacuum, but surrounded by all the inherited learning and literature and experience of our civilization; not alone, but in the company of kindred spirits; not as a sole occupation, but combined with the discipline of studying a recognized branch of learning; and neither as a first step in education (for those wholly ignorant of how to behave or think) nor as a final education to fit a man for the day of judgment, but as a middle. This interval is nothing so commonplace as a pause to get one's breath; ... it is not the cessation of activity, but the occasion of a unique kind of activity. ...

In short, this period at a university may not have equipped him very effectively to earn a living, but he will have learned something to help him lead a more significant life. [Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, Yale UP, 1989, pp. 101-103]

2 Of course money matters: jobs matter, financial security matters, national prosperity matters. ... You need to get a job, but you also need to get a life. ... Anyone who tells you that the sole purpose of education is the acquisition of negotiable skills is attempting to reduce you to a productive employee at work, a gullible consumer in the market, and a docile subject of the state. What's at stake, when we ask what college is for, is nothing less than our ability to remain fully human. ...

The first thing that college is for is to teach you to think. ... to liberate us from ["opinion," or that which keeps us from the truth: propaganda, advertising messages, political rhetoric, platitudes of popular culture, falsehoods we tell ourselves to stave off the threat of self-knowledge] by teaching us to recognize it, to question it, and to think our way through it. ...

Learning how to think is only the beginning, though. There's something in particular you need to think about: yourself. ... [I]t is only through this act of introspection, of self-examination, of establishing communication between the mind and the heart, the mind and experience, that you become an individual, a unique being—a soul. ...

Of all the beliefs we absorb before we're old enough to question them, the most powerful, as well as the most personal, are those that tell us who we are—that seek to determine our identity and our values. College is the place to start to determine them for yourself, to figure out, as the Columbia historian Mark Lilla has put it, "just what it is that's worth wanting." ... To start to answer for yourself that venerable pair of questions: what is the good life and how should I live it? ...

The purpose of college is to enable you to live more alertly, more responsibly, more freely: more fully. [William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, Free Press / Simon & Schuster, 2014, pp. 73, 77-79, 79-81, 82-85, 82]

3 What, then, is the chief end of a college of arts and sciences? Why, to enable a body of senior scholars (the professors) and a body of junior scholars (the undergraduates) to seek Wisdom—and through Wisdom, for Truth.

The end is not success, pleasure, or sociability, but wisdom. This wisdom is not the same as facts, utility, training, or even knowledge. No college can confer wisdom, but a good college can help its members to acquire the means to pursue wisdom. Wisdom means apprehension of the human condition, recognition of reality, and the experience and possession of high knowledge—together with the power to apply experience and knowledge critically and practically. ... I endeavor to present to you a model college that might help to make the acquisition of wisdom less difficult than it is at present; a college some of whose graduates might be philosophers (lovers of wisdom), and many of whose graduates might be, at least, men of right reason, humane inclinations, and sound taste. [Russell Kirk, "The Revitalized College: A Model," *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, pp. 133-134]

4 I recommend that we do whatever is in our power to restore a general consciousness that the aim of higher education is the inculcation of an understanding of moral worth, achieved through right reason. ... For what gives a man dignity, what makes possible a

democracy of elevation, what makes any society tolerable, what gives leaders their right to office, what keeps the modern world from becoming *Brave New World*, and what constitutes real success in any walk of life is the attainment of moral worth. [Russell Kirk, "The Revitalized College: A Model," *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, p. 139]

5 The college should reaffirm that the end of a liberal education is an ethical consciousness, through which the student is brought to an apprehension of the enduring truths that govern our being, of the principles of self-control, and of the dignity of man.

The college should make it clear that this ethical end is sought through an intellectual discipline, exacting in its character, which regards "useless knowledge" as infinitely more valuable than simple utilitarian skills.

The college should return to a concise curriculum emphasizing religious knowledge, moral philosophy, humane letters, rhetoric, languages, history, logic, and the pure sciences.

The college should set its face against amorphous "survey courses," "general education," and similar substitutes for really intellectual disciplines. Such a smattering produces only that little learning which is a dangerous thing.

The college should turn away from vocationalism, resigning to trade schools and industrial "in-service training" what the college never was founded to undertake.

The college should abandon its attempt to encroach upon the specialized and professional studies which are the proper province of the graduate school and universities.

The college should say less about "socialization" and "personality building" and more about the improvement of the human reason, for the human reason's own sake. ...

The college should endeavor deliberately to keep its student body within reasonable limits, its humane scale being one of its principal virtues.

The college should emancipate itself from quasi-commercialized programs of athletics, an expensive and often anti-intellectual pastime in which it cannot compete successfully with Behemoth University.

The college should reduce to a minimum the elective feature in its curriculum, for one of the college's principal strengths was formerly its recognition of order and hierarchy in the higher learning, and the undergraduate ordinarily is not yet capable of judging with discretion what his course of studies ought to be. ...

The college should inculcate in its students a sense of gratitude toward the generations that have preceded us in time and a sense of obligation toward the generations yet to be born. It should remind the rising generation that we are part of a long continuity and essence, and that we moderns are only dwarfs standing upon the shoulders of giants. This consciousness lies at the heart of a liberal education. [Russell Kirk, "The Revitalized College: A Model," *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, pp. 152-155]

6 At its core, a college should be a place where young people find help for navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood. It should provide guidance, but not coercion, for students trying to cross that treacherous terrain on their way toward self-knowledge. It should help them develop certain qualities of mind and heart requisite for reflective citizenship. Here is my own attempt at reducing these qualities to a list, in no particular order of priority, since they are inseparable from one another:

1. A skeptical discontent with the present, informed by a sense of the past.

2. The ability to make connections among seemingly disparate phenomena.

3. Appreciation of the natural world, enhanced by knowledge of science and the arts.

4. A willingness to imagine experience from perspectives other than one's own.

5. A sense of ethical responsibility.

These habits of thought and feeling are hard to attain and harder to sustain. ... It is absurd to imagine them as commodities to be purchased by and delivered to student consumers. Ultimately they make themselves known not in grades or examinations but in the way we live our lives. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, pp. 3-4]

7 In the ideal college, there would be no credits, no degrees, and no required courses. A person would learn what he wanted to learn. ...

The ideal college would be a kind of educational retreat in which you could try to find yourself; find out what you like and want; what you are and are not good at. People would take various subjects, attend various seminars, not quite sure of where they were going, but moving toward the discovery of vocation, and *once they found it*, they could then make good use of technological education. The chief goals of the ideal college, in other words, would be the *discovery of identity*, and with it, the *discovery of vocation*.

What do we mean by the discovery of identity? We mean finding out what your real desires and characteristics are, and being able to live in a way that expresses them. You learn to be authentic, to be honest in the sense of allowing your behavior and your speech to be the true and spontaneous expression of your inner feelings. [Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, 1971, Penguin, 1993, p. 176, https://www.slideshare.net/imbangjtrenggana/abraham-h-maslow-the-farther-reaches-of-human-nature-penguin-nonclassics-1993]

8 [In our ideal university,] *no degrees would be given or diplomas awarded.* The college would exist to serve students truly seeking knowledge, not those seeking only a degree or other meaningless relics from the current system.

Neither courses nor teachers would be organized by departments or divisions. Quite naturally, some range of interests in the faculty would be deliberately sought, but the artificiality of departmental lines would be avoided. *Note:* The *fact* of departmentalization for administrative purposes is not the great evil; it is the *spirit* of intellectual departmentalization that we would seek to avoid. ...

No grades in the usual sense of that term would be given, except at the request of the student or his parents (or some person or agency providing the student with financial assistance). We suggest this arrangement not because we are opposed to competition for excellence among students, but because the real purpose of education is for each individual to make the maximum progress possible *for that person*—for this, relative judgments are not significant. ...

We are not opposed to fun—we just don't believe that it is the business of the college to organize, sponsor, or finance it.

The college would not take responsibility for the general lives of its students; it would not serve *in loco parentis*. Some colleges might choose to do so (for a price), but not this

one. [Benjamin A. Rogge and Pierre F. Goodrich, "Education in a Free Society," *Education in a Free Society*, edited by Anne Husted Burleigh, Liberty Fund, 1973, pp. 89-91]

9 [W]e must somehow free the colleges from the burden of vocationalism by having other social agencies do whatever may be necessary to fit people into jobs. ... or if [taken care of] by the colleges, *at least outside the curriculum*. ...

We must so reform the curriculum, methods of teaching, and examinations, that we do not mistake the B.A. degree as signifying either a completed liberal education or adequate preparation for earning a living or living a happy life. It should signify only decent preparation for the continuing task of adult education.

A liberal curriculum should, therefore, include no vocational instruction; nor should it permit any subject-matter specialization. In a liberal college there should be no departmental divisions, no electives ... The faculty should comprise teachers all of whom are responsible for understanding and administering the whole curriculum; lectures should be kept to a minimum ... ; the basic precept of pedagogy should be the direction of the mind by questions and the methods of answering them, not the stuffing of it with answers; oral examinations must be used to separate facile verbalizers and memorizers from those in whom genuine intellectual skills are beginning to develop and whose minds have become hospitable to ideas. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 112]

10 There are many routes to a liberal education; ... a college would be wise to offer a number of routes from which [students] may choose, and to give them considerable leeway in deciding how to follow them. But each of these routes—each of the curricula —must have coherence and purpose, each must reflect some conviction about what is worth knowing and doing and being. Students are not likely to be able to learn how to choose, how to decide for themselves between the better and the worse, if their teachers convey the notion that the choices do not matter. If students "see in the four years ahead of them in college no large horizons, no anticipations of delight, no promise of an opening up of their lives, but only duties to be borne and trivial tasks to undertake," Harold Taylor writes, "they are unlikely to find the inner energies through which to infuse their own education with a sense of purpose. ... " [*The World and the American Teacher*]

What made undergraduate education so exciting at Columbia and Chicago in the thirties and forties, certainly, was not that these colleges had defined liberal education "correctly" either for that period or for all time, but that they had conceptions that shaped the students' and faculties' lives outside the classroom as well as in. The conception was not one that every faculty member shared; much of the excitement, in fact, stemmed from the faculty members', and students', disagreements over what should be studied. What the faculty did share, however, is critical to liberal education: a concern for the possibilities and character of education, a conviction that the shape and content of the curriculum really matters, that some kinds and sequences of courses are better than others, and that the curriculum, consequently, should be shaped by educational conviction rather than by administrative convenience. [Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*, 1970, Vintage / Random House, 1971, pp. 402-403]

11 If they are to turn out educated men and women—men and women capable of educating themselves and others—our institutions of higher education can no longer relegate the study of education to those who happen to teach or study in the school of education. ... [T]he study of education must be put back where it belongs, at the heart of the college or university, rather than at its margin, for no man can be considered truly educated unless he has thought seriously about education in general and his own education in particular. [Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*, 1970, Vintage / Random House, 1971, p. 517]

12 The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. ...

Imagination is not to be divorced from the facts: it is a way of illuminating the facts. ... It enables men to construct an intellectual vision of a new world, and it preserves the zest of life by the suggestion of satisfying purposes. ...

The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations. Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of the university is to weld together imagination and experience. [Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays,* Williams and Norgate, 1955, pp. 139-140]

13 We tend not to remember, or perhaps half-deliberately to forget, that college was once conceived not as a road to wealth or as a screening service for a social club, but as a training ground for pastors, teachers, and, more broadly, public servants. Founded as philanthropic institutions, the English originals of America's colleges were "expected," as [Samuel Eliot] Morison put it, "to dispense alms to outsiders, as well as charity to their own children." Benjamin Franklin, founder of the University of Pennsylvania, who was both a conservator and renovator of the Puritan tradition, put it this way: "The idea of what is *true merit*, should ... be often presented to youth, explain'd and impress'd on their minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends, and Family ... which Ability should be the great *Aim* and *End* of all learning." [*Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, 1749] [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 65]

14 [B]y failing to reconnect their students to the idea that good fortune confers a responsibility to live generously toward the less fortunate, too many colleges are doing too little to help students cope with this siege of uncertainty. One of the insights at the core of the college idea—indeed of the idea of community itself—has always been that to serve others is to serve oneself by providing a sense of purpose, thereby countering the loneliness and aimlessness by which all people, young and old, can be afflicted. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 148]

15 Ortega saw that the university had to be restored to its cardinal function of "enlightenment"; that its task was that of imparting the full culture of the time, and revealing to mankind, with clarity and truthfulness, the gigantic world of today. [*Mission of the University*, 1944] ... The university had to reassert itself "as a major 'spiritual power,' higher than the press, standing for serenity in the midst of frenzy, for seriousness and the grasp of the intellect in the face of frivolity and unashamed stupidity". [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, p. 53]

16 Our people should be able to look to the universities for the moral courage, the intellectual clarity, and the spiritual elevation needed to guide them and uphold them in this critical hour. The universities must continue to pioneer on the new frontiers of research. But today research is not enough either to hold the university together or to

give direction to bewildered humanity. We must now seek not knowledge alone, but wisdom.

This is what the University Grants Committee of England meant when it said, "Here arises the responsibility of the universities. They are the inheritors of the Greek tradition of candid and intrepid thinking about the fundamental issues involved in the life of the individual and of the community, and of the Greek principle that the unexamined life is no life for man."

Candid and intrepid thinking about fundamental issues—in the crisis of our time this is the central obligation of the universities. This is the standard by which they must be judged. This is the aim which will give unity, intelligibility, and meaning to their work. This is the road to wisdom. Upon that road the American university will regain its own soul and bring hope and comfort to a distracted world. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 100-102, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

17 If the university is not the temple of the intellect, then it is not a university. [Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death*, U of Chicago P, 1985, p. 6]

18 A university's greatness consists in its being the intellectual forum of the community, the place where the basic issues of its culture are fruitfully debated. [Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, Macmillan, 1988, p. 37]

19 Whatever its contribution to vocational education, the university should be the society's specialized organ of critical self-scrutiny. It is only when the university functions primarily as a port of entry for aspirants to the higher reaches of the social system that it loses its critical function; for aspirants do not criticize, they accommodate. [Edgar Friedenberg, *The Dignity of Youth and Other Atavisms*, Beacon, 1965, pp. 197-198]

20 No matter how wide the doors are thrown open, how many new accommodations are built, how much scholarship money is voted by Congress and the states, the terrible fact remains: The American university exists to shape candidates for the jobs of the American commercial-industrial system. It is a professional and vocational institution, not truly an "educative" one. It is a place where one spends four or more years

mechanically earning the right to fill the better available jobs. It is education *for* society as it now stands, rather than for the *ideals* of a society as it might better be. ... [T]he aim of the whole process gets lost—namely, the best possible development of the student. Alas, this inner development is not really measurable, quantifiable, or visible. And so, the hard reality loses out to the paper tiger; the symbol becomes the thing; the administration *of* education *becomes* education. [Ernest Becker, *Beyond Alienation: A Philosophy of Education for the Crisis of Democracy*, George Braziller, 1967, pp. 18-19]

21 Now, as then, most students have no clear conception of why or to what end they are in college. Some students have always been aimless, bored, or confused; others self-possessed, with their eyes on the prize. Most are somewhere in between, looking for something to care about. ...

[E]very college has an obligation to make itself a place not just for networking and credentialing but for learning in the broad and deep meaning of that word. It means that all students deserve something more from college than semi-supervised fun or the services of an employment agency. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 24]

22 [T]he object of the university is to see knowledge, life, the world, or truth whole. The aim of the university is to tame the pretensions and excesses of experts and specialists by drawing them into the academic circle and subjecting them to the criticism of other disciplines. Everything in the university is to be seen in the light of everything else. [Robert Hutchins, *The Learning Society*, Mentor / New American Library, 1968, p. 135]

23 Education is the deliberate attempt to form human character in terms of an ideal. ... To formulate, to clarify, to vitalize the ideals which should animate mankind—this is the incredibly heavy burden which rests, even in total war, upon the universities. If they cannot carry it, nobody else will; for nobody else can. [Robert M. Hutchins, *Education for Freedom*, 1943, Louisiana State UP, 1947, pp. 104-105, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.501404]

Related:

– What is the reality of the university?

– What is education for? What should the goals of education be?

35. What is the reality of the university?

1 "Finding great teachers and insisting on learning from them is a form of resistance," [David Coleman, president of the College Board,] wrote in the *Atlantic*. "You must push the rules and the system. One of the most misleading things we say in education is that a good school will 'give you an excellent education.' A great education is never given—it is taken." [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, Harper Collins, 2021, pp. 108-109]

2 You now may think that you've about got it made. Amidst the impressive college buildings, in company with a high-powered faculty, surrounded by the best of your generation, all you need is to keep doing what you've done before: Work hard, get good grades, listen to your teachers, get along with the people around you, and you'll emerge in four years as an educated young man or woman. Ready for life.

Do not believe it. It is not true. If you want to get a real education in America you're going to have to fight—and I don't mean just fight against the drugs and the violence and against the slime-based culture that is still going to surround you. I mean something a little more disturbing. To get an education, you're probably going to have to fight against the institution that you find yourself in—no matter how prestigious it may be. (In fact, the more prestigious the school, the more you'll probably have to push.) You can get a terrific education in America now—there are astonishing opportunities at almost every college—but the education will not be presented to you wrapped and bowed. To get it, you'll need to struggle and strive, to be strong, and occasionally even to piss off some admirable people. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 51-52]

3 So, if you want an education, the odds aren't with you: The professors are off doing what they call their own work; the other students, who've doped out the way the place runs, are busy leaving the professors alone and getting themselves in position for bright and shining futures; the student-services people are trying to keep everyone content, offering plenty of entertainment and building another state-of-the-art workout facility every few months. The development office is already scanning you for future donations.

The primary function of Yale University, it's recently been said, is to create prosperous alumni so as to enrich Yale University.

So why make trouble? Why not just go along? Let the profs roam free in the realms of pure thought, let yourselves party in the realms of impure pleasure, and let the student-services gang assert fewer prohibitions and newer delights for you. You'll get a good job, you'll have plenty of friends, you'll have a driveway of your own.

You'll also, if [I'm] right, be truly and righteously screwed. The reason for this is simple. The quest at the center of a liberal-arts education is not a luxury quest; it's a necessity quest. If you do not undertake it, you risk leading a life of desperation—maybe quiet, maybe, in time, very loud—and I am not exaggerating. For you risk trying to be someone other than who you are, which, in the long run, is killing. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 58-59]

4 To almost everyone, university education is a means to an end. ... Students come to college with the goal of a diploma in mind—what happens in between, especially in classrooms, is often of no deep and determining interest to them.

In college, life is elsewhere. Life is at parties, at clubs, in music, with friends, in sports. Life is what celebrities have. The idea that the courses you take should be the primary objective of going to college is tacitly considered absurd. In terms of their work, students live in the future and not the present; they live with their prospects for success. If universities stopped issuing credentials, half of the clients would be gone by tomorrow morning, with the remainder following fast behind. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. 53-54]

5 A great majority of our nine million college students are not in school because they want to be or because they want to learn. They are there because it has become the thing to do or because college is a pleasant place to be; because it's the only way they can get parents or taxpayers to support them without getting a job they don't like; because Mother wanted them to go, or some other reason entirely irrelevant to the course of studies for which college is supposedly organized.

As I crisscross the United States lecturing on college campuses, I am dismayed to find that professors and administrators, when pressed for a candid opinion, estimate that no more than 25 percent of their students are turned on by classwork. For the rest, college is

at best a social center or aging vat, and at worst a young folks' home or even a prison that keeps them out of the mainstream economic life for a few more years. [Caroline Bird, "College is a Waste of Time and Money," *The Case Against College*, David McKay Co., 1975, https://www.scribd.com/document/46775622/Caroline-Bird-College-is-a-Waste-of-Time-and-Money]

6 For some careers, having a degree is still important. And, on balance, graduates can still expect to earn a lot more over their lifetimes than nongraduates. But having a degree is no longer a guarantee of work in any field, and in some it's an expensive irrelevance.

Of course, some people go to college because they really do want to pursue their academic studies. But to judge by the low graduation rates (more than 40 percent of U.S. college students do not complete a college degree), a sizable number, especially in the West, trudge off to higher education because it's what you do after high school. Many have no particular sense of purpose when they get there, and a significant number leave early without graduating. Others graduate with no clear idea of what to do next. Many are saddled with debt. In 2014, the average student graduating from college in the United States after four to six years was carrying a loan debt of between twenty and a hundred thousand dollars. In the United States, the burden of student debt has grown each year since 2004, from just over $300 billion to $1.3 trillion in 2013—higher than all forms of credit card debt combined. [Ken Robinson, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, Viking, 2015, pp. 15-16]

7 Of those who entered a four-year college in 1995, only 58 percent had gotten their BA five academic years later. Another 14 percent were still enrolled. If we assume that half of that 14 percent eventually get their BAs, about a third of all those who entered college hoping for a BA leave without one. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 104]

8 [O]ver the past few years, it has become clear that the United States does not so much have a problem of limited and unequal college *access*; it has a problem of limited and unequal college *completion*. ... [I]n college completion—the percentage of entering college freshmen who go on to graduate—the United States ranks second to last ... Not long ago, the United States led the world in producing college graduates; now it leads the world in producing college dropouts. ...

The authors [of *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities*] also discovered that the most accurate predictor of whether a student would successfully complete college was not his or her score on the SAT or the ACT, the two standardized college admissions tests. ... The far better predictor of college completion was the student's high-school GPA. ...

"In our view," [the authors] wrote, "high school grades reveal much more than mastery of content. They reveal qualities of motivation and perseverance—as well as the presence of good study habits and time management skills—that tell us a great deal about the chances that a student will complete a college program." [Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, pp. 150-153]

9 Midway through the last decade of the twentieth century, American higher education changed. Colleges and universities entered a new phase in which they stopped being intellectually driven and culturally oriented and began to model themselves as businesses. They sought profit; they sought prestige; the more the better. To be sure, there had always been a commercial side to American higher education. But in the mid-nineties, universities began dropping pretenses and putting profit ahead of intellectual and (dare one say it?) spiritual values. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, p. vii]

10 Among the many ways that colleges have evolved during the last three decades, the change in the student-teacher relationship appears to have been the most complete. In important respects, it is now the professors who must accommodate themselves to the preferences of the students, not the other way around. Requirements that used to be inflexible, such as the due date for papers, are now commonly revised when the student just can't get it done by then. Many professors permit quizzes or even final exams to be made up if missed—missed not because of an emergency at home or a fever of 104 degrees, but just, sort of, like, missed. At many schools, student evaluations of professors are now systematically collected and used as part of the tenure decision process, and being a tough teacher does not lead to enthusiastic evaluations. ...

In this environment, the opportunities for learning of all kinds have diminished. Students learn less in the way of subject matter, but also less in the way of hard work, self-discipline, self-restraint, and respect for superior knowledge. [Charles Murray, *Real*

Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 98-100]

11 How did the students respond to being treated like customers? ... They'd grown up in front of the television, being treated like monarchs of the marketplace. When the universities followed suit and began to address them with similar deference, the kids ate it up. On came expensive student centers, lavish gyms, gourmet dining, and slews of student service workers, deans and deanlets to cater to the whims of the customers. Universities began to look like retirement homes for the young.

No surprise that when the kids got to the classroom they demanded a soft ride: They wanted easy grading, lots of pass-fail courses, light homework, more laughs. If the professors didn't oblige, the kids flayed them on the course evaluations. Those evaluations had an impact on tenure, promotion, salary, and prestige. By and large, the profession caved. [Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?: In Defense of a Real Education*, Bloomsbury USA, 2013, pp. ix-x]

12 [I]n any sector of the economy where price competition is reduced or eliminated, there is also a common economic phenomenon called "non-price competition," in the form of frills added to the basic product or service being sold, in order to woo customers. Professor Chester E. Finn, Jr., of Vanderbilt University, a noted authority on education, has described this phenomenon in the academic world: "Instead of vying to offer the best, trimmest product at the lowest possible price, colleges compete to erect elaborate facilities, to offer trendy new programs, and to dangle before prospective students the gaudiest array of special services..." ["Consumers Need A 'No-Frills University' to Turn the Higher-Education Marketplace Upside Down," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 Oct. 1988]

Such frills are not a response to a free market but are common symptoms of non-price competition in a market that is *not* free. ... If the academic world ever becomes [a] "free market" ... many academic frills can be expected to fall by the wayside ... as institutions compete to keep tuition within student's ability to pay—instead of having incentives under present conditions to make sure that tuition exceeds what most people can afford. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, pp. 263-264]

13 As an official of the U.S. Department of Education put it, many colleges "choose to increase tuition because they can get away with it." While colleges claim that the increased spending is to improve education, this official saw it as going into "the swelling of the ranks of vice presidents and deans" and to other costly endeavors which make little or no contribution to quality education, which is "not a function of money." [Joseph Berger, "College Officials Defend Sharply Rising Tuition," *New York Times*, 23 March 1988, p. 18] The availability of federal grants and loans to help students meet rising tuition costs virtually ensures that those costs will rise. A college which kept tuition affordable could forfeit millions of dollars annually in federal money available to cover costs *over and above* what students can afford, according to a financial aid formula. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, p. 117]

14 Nearly 150 years ago, when Charles W. Eliot remarked that "luxury and learning are ill bed fellows," the phrase was a commonplace expressing a consensus across a broad range of institutions. Today, top colleges vie for students by offering amenities superior to those of the competition—better-stocked coffee bars in the library, better equipped fitness centers in the dorms, and so on. At some colleges, the campus tour now resembles a promotional tour of a luxury resort. ... Today, the tone of college life can be gleaned by glancing at some representative titles of recent books: *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*; *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*; *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*; *University, Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*—to name just a few. One Ivy League dean recently declared that universities should simply give up the fantasy of holding to academic values that stand apart from the culture of "universal commodification." [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, pp. 142-143]

15 Given the enormous variation in the quality of teaching, even on the same campus, the most expensive tuitions paid cannot guarantee that the education received will be first-rate—or even adequate. Whether the heavy costs of a college education are borne by the taxpayers or by parents, there is very little institutional assurance as to the quality of what they are paying for.

With the disintegration of the curriculum at many colleges and universities, students may graduate from prestigious institutions wholly ignorant of entire fields of human

knowledge, such as economics, mathematics, biology, history, government, chemistry, and sociology. ... Loose curriculum requirements are damaging, as William F. Buckley put it, "not because you cannot get a good education at Harvard, but because you can graduate from Harvard without getting a good education." [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, p. 221]

16 [A] Carnegie Foundation study found that only 35 percent of the full-time faculty members at research universities considered teaching their chief interest, compared to 71 percent of faculty members at all institutions combined. A science professor at the University of Michigan put the situation bluntly when he said: "Every minute I spend in an undergraduate classroom is costing me money and prestige." [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, p. 205]

17 The compact goes like this: If professors don't assign too much work, they won't have to grade too much and can get back to the research that their overlords reward them for. Then students can give the professors nice feedback in their evaluations and press on with the delusion that they learned as much as they could have. ... "No actors in the system are primarily interested in undergraduate student academic growth, although many are interested in undergraduate retention and persistence. ... The institutional actors implicated in the system are receiving the organizational outcomes that they seek, and therefore neither the institutions themselves nor the system as a whole is in any way challenged or threatened." [Arum and Roksa, *Academically Adrift*, 2011] [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, Harper Collins, 2021, pp. 112]

18 [S]ome of the best research on higher education outcomes ... proves that mentors matter more than nearly anything else in finding life satisfaction as a young adult. ... [Yet] countless prominent insiders at the schools that top the *U.S. News & World Report* list have not just admitted but lamented the haphazard approach they take to teaching undergraduates. ...

[Did] graduates have professors who cared about them personally, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams? ...

Just 14 percent [of respondents] strongly agree when Gallup asked if they had actually experienced the three aspects of mentorship. ... [T]he so-called R1 research universities —mostly big, mostly public—had scored second worst on mentorship, with Ivy League schools coming in dead last due to their propensity for hiring famous researchers who are not good teachers. ... Also, people with arts and humanities degrees were twice as likely to "strongly agree" with the mentorship statements as business ... and science and engineering majors did. [Ron Lieber, *The Price You Pay For College: An Entirely New Road Map for the Biggest Financial Decision Your Family Will Ever Make*, Harper Collins, 2021, pp. 103-105]

19 To think that more money for the university system translates into better undergraduate education is a faith that passeth all understanding. As at other research universities, it is at least equally likely that a *reduction* in research money would benefit undergraduate teaching. [Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education: The Decline, The Deception, The Dogmas*, Free Press, 1993, p. 274]

20 In today's America, at every kind of institution—from underfunded community colleges to the wealthiest ivies—[liberal education] is at risk. Students are pressured and programmed, trained to live from task to task, relentlessly rehearsed and tested until winners are culled from the rest. They scarcely have time for what [John Henry] Newman calls contemplation, and too many colleges do too little to save them from the debilitating frenzy that makes liberal education marginal or merely ornamental—if it is offered at all. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 34]

21 The university now offers no distinctive visage to the young person. ... In short there is no vision, nor is there a set of competing visions, of what an educated human being is. The question has disappeared, for to pose it would be a threat to the peace. There is no organization of the sciences, no tree of knowledge. ... The student gets no intimation that great mysteries might be revealed to him, that new and higher motives of action might be discovered within him, that a different and more human way of life can be harmoniously constructed by what he is going to learn. ...

Thus, when a student arrives at the university, he finds a bewildering variety of departments and a bewildering variety of courses. And there is no official guidance, no

university-wide agreement, about what he *should* study. Nor does he usually find readily available examples, either among students or professors, of a unified use of the university's resources. It is easiest simply to make a career choice and go about getting prepared for that career. [Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, Simon and Schuster, 1987, pp. 337-338]

22 There are no measures [in the ranking of colleges] pertinent to the liberal education of undergraduates. It is hard to know how there could be. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, p. 136]

23 Some people believe that a main contributor to the sorry state of academic ethics, especially to the contagion of money, is what Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, in their recent book *Higher Education? How Colleges Are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids—and What We Can Do About It*, call the "athletic incubus." This charge has some basis in a national context where football coaches, sometimes paid in the millions, collude with administrators to provide fake credits for courses never taken, and strippers and prostitutes are hired to show a good time to recruits ...

In the Ivies, financial incentives beyond demonstrated need are not permitted for recruiting any applicant—athletic or otherwise—but a significant number (typically around 20 percent) of places in the class are, to all intents and purposes, reserved for recruits needed to fill the team rosters. Other highly selective institutions, too, make academic compromises to meet athletic imperatives. [Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, Princeton UP, 2012, pp. 145-146]

24 Many people see college as the end of the road, and never stop to think of what it will be like when they get there. ...

The college environment is drastically different from most kids' experience in high school, and many teens haven't developed some of the fundamental skills they will need to function in that environment before leaving home. ... For many, it's chaos when their parents are no longer there to nag and remind and set limits. ...

Let's consider for a moment the daily stressors that most college students experience:

> *An average bedtime of 2:00 to 3:00 a.m. ... Hours of unstructured time. ... A culture where binge drinking is the norm. ... Food-related issues. ... Stimulant abuse. ...*
>
> Is your kid ready to manage the alternative universe that is college life in America? This is a question that it takes courage to ask—and one that we wish more parents were asking. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 285-291]

25 For many, college is a really expensive party. They are usually excited to go, but they look at us blankly when we speak about the long hours they'll need to spend studying. ...

> We see lots of kids every year who ... go off to college before they can independently get themselves into or out of bed, manage their own academic work, hold a part-time job, or regulate their use of their cell phone, video games, and other electronic entertainment. Many of them have had parents or guidance counselors who have essentially force-marched them down the straight path to college, reinforcing the idea that it's more important to try to make kids do well than to help them truly understand that they are responsible for their own lives. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, pp. 291-292]

26 For college kids ... playtime is now longer than ever. The college workload slimmed down as K-12's bulked up. Most critics of modern education take this as a tragic fall in standards. But once you accept the merit of play, the rise of Leisure College, USA, is a blessing in disguise. College gives students ample time for carefree exploration—time they rarely had in childhood. Plenty of undergrads fritter away their opportunity in a drunken stupor. Yet others sample a medley of fascinating options, acquiring passions that last a lifetime. My undergraduate years were my favorites precisely because classes were so undemanding. ... I owe my soul to lax academic standards. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 258-259]

27 [C]ollege can be an expensive waste of time—or worse, a time when many young people learn how to cultivate selfishness, ... separate work and pleasure, develop cynical attitudes toward the value and beauty of learning, and practice, in groups of their peers, all the prejudices that our society has struggled to eliminate. One need only think about

sports and party mania, the volume of business done by crib note companies, the resurgence of racism on many campuses, and fraternity and sorority arrogance and irresponsibility to get a picture of many colleges as glorified singles bars and business clubs rather than places of learning. In that sense, sadly, these students may indeed be training for life in our society. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, pp. 18-19]

28 We need to overhaul the way we think about college. ... Parents should consider sending their kid to college just as they'd consider a business investment—because it *is* a huge investment. Youth may be wasted on the young, but that's nothing like the education misspent on students who are not yet ready to learn. ... Almost 50 percent of the students who enroll in four-year colleges don't graduate. And when they don't, it's painful to the kids and costly to their parents. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 292]

29 The process of encouraging readiness [for college] must begin much earlier. Start suggesting as early as ninth grade that college is something that needs to be earned. Begin to outline together the kinds of skills your child will need to develop over the next four years in order to demonstrate their readiness. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *The Self-Driven Child: The Science and Sense of Giving Your Kids More Control Over Their Lives*, Viking, 2018, p. 302]

30 Imagine that America had no system of postsecondary education and you were made a member of a task force assigned to create one from scratch. Ask yourself what you would think if one of your colleagues submitted this proposal:

First, we will set up a common goal for every young person that represents educational success. We will call it a BA. We will then make it difficult or impossible for most people to achieve this goal. For those who can, achieving the goal will take four years no matter what is being taught. We will attach an economic reward for reaching the goal that often has little to do with the content of what has been learned. We will lure large numbers of people who do not possess adequate ability or motivation to try to achieve the goal and then fail. We will then stigmatize everyone who fails to achieve it.

> What I have just described is the system that we have in place. There must be a better way. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 106]

Related:
– What is "signaling" and why is it an important concept in education?
– What is motivation? How can we cultivate it in ourselves and others?
– What is the proper function of the university?

36. How are young people prepared for the world of work?

1 Affluence and our modern sensibilities have removed hardships from most children's lives, and this is certainly fortunate. At the same time, they also have removed many external demands on children's time and effort—so much so that the value of effort itself is called into question. The notion of effort as a virtue in itself—the so-called "work ethic"—is rapidly going out of fashion, even in the United States, where it once was considered almost definitional of the national character. Recent student surveys have found that barely more than a quarter of American youngsters place top priority on working hard, as opposed to almost three-quarters of Japanese youth. [L. Cheney, "Hard Work, Once as American as Apple Pie," *Wall Street Journal*, December 5, 1993] High school teachers from well-off school districts routinely quote today's brightest students as saying: "It's cool to wing it; to do the least work possible and get away with it;" or, "It's the American way—to get the best results with the least amount of energy expended." [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, Free Press Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster, 1995, p. 37]

2 An essential ingredient for growing up with sensible attitudes toward work is the availability of adult models who can teach by example what a young person needs to do to become a productive member of society. Here, too, the current situation leaves much to be desired. As the psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner pointed out long ago, our society is characterized by age segregation to an extent unparalleled in the past. Young people are isolated from adults and tend to congregate with their peers and thus are rarely exposed to role models who are involved in meaningful activities. ... When they are with peers, teenagers feel significantly happier but are also less able to concentrate and are less in control of their actions. It is the hedonistic values of the peer culture that are transmitted in such contexts, rather than more realistic prerequisites for a productive adulthood. ...

In the imagination of our children, the pendulum has clearly swung away from instrumental models involved in productive activity to expressive models admired for their entertainment value.

Such expressive role models are attractive not the least because our culture presents them as people who enjoy what they do and whose lives are well rewarded and free of care. While engineers and accountants are presumed to lead lives devoid of variety and excitement, rock singers and star athletes have it all. Our culture conspires to reinforce this image and to disguise the reality: how few media stars out of the innumerable aspirants actually succeed and how few of those who succeed lead happy and contented lives. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, pp. 14-15]

3 No other technique for the conduct of life attaches the individual so firmly to reality as laying emphasis on work; for his work at least gives him a secure place in a portion of reality, in the human community. The possibility it offers of displacing a large amount of libidinal components, whether narcissistic, aggressive or even erotic, on to professional work and on to the human relations connected with it lends it a value by no means second to what it enjoys as something indispensable to the preservation and justification of existence in society. [Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930, quoted by Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families From The Torment of Adolescence*, Quill Driver, 2010, p. 274]

4 [F]or most young Americans, the transition to productive occupations has been postponed many years beyond high school graduation. Apparently, the main decision of the last few years of high school is not which career to pursue but which college to attend. The main task of high school is not to prepare students for jobs but to prepare them for further education. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, p. 211]

5 We keep children out of any position where they could actually do real work that would help their society. And if we think about why there's a youth mental health crisis, this is one of the reasons. You become a teenager, you look out at the world, you see all these problems, and yet you're put in a context of school where none of the work you're doing contributes to those problems. ...

By David Graber's definition ... school is a "bullshit job." ... [Y]ou're working your ass off, but the work you're doing doesn't contribute to anyone else's work. You don't have to do that work. The world does not need your work. School work is something you do

to get grades to then go to the next school, to then get grades to go to college, … and then maybe after you graduate college, *then* you'll be able to contribute to society. And so what that means is that kids feel like they're worthless …

[W]e've forced [children] into lives that are not serious. … [M]any of them are ready to be quite serious by the time they're 12 or 13, if not earlier. And again, most prior human cultures had that. I'd like to say that people who are about 30 years old now are probably about as mature as 15 year olds from most cultures that have ever existed on the Earth … [where] by the time you're 15 you've: … been responsible for your younger siblings in a way that is not contrived, … you've been contributing to the economic productivity of the culture that you're in, sometimes filling essential roles …

So I'm not saying let's do away with child labor laws … but I am saying that we are creating a kind of immaturity, and then we're shocked when they're all so immature. What do you expect? You've given them nothing serious to do for most of their lives and now you expect them to just be mature and serious? Where can they be challenged? Where can they learn to fail, where can they confront … *reality*?—not in school. [Zak Stein, "The Education Crisis | Elevating Consciousness Podcast #13," *YouTube*, uploaded by Artem Zen, 8 July 2022, 29:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=204qp-YS5Nw]

6 What school inculcates is not so much the work ethic as the *school* ethic. … Both school and work teach you to follow orders and cooperate with others. Yet they define and measure success differently. School elevates abstract understanding over practical results, passing exams over passing the market test, and fairness over dollars and cents. Andrew Carnegie caustically captures this tension: …

"[Students] have been 'educated' as if they were destined for life upon some other planet than this. What they have obtained has served to imbue them with false ideas and to give them a distaste for practical life. Had they gone into active work during the years spent at college they would have been better educated men in every true sense of the term. The fire and energy have been stamped out of them, and how to so manage as to live a life of idleness and not a life of usefulness has become the chief question with them." …

The imperfect overlap between the school ethic and the work ethic is especially blatant in modern American colleges. Fifty years ago, college was a full-time job. The typical student spent 40 hours a week in class or studying. Since the early 1960's, effort

collapsed across the board. "Full-time" college students average 27 hours of academic work per week—and only 14 hours of studying. ...

What are students doing with their extra time? Having fun. ...

Grade inflation completes the idyllic package by shielding students from negative feedback. The average GPA is now 3.2. Instead of making students conform and submit, college showers students with acceptance. This doesn't merely fail to prepare students for their future roles; it actively *un*prepares them. College raises students' expectations to unrealistic heights, leaving future employers the chore of dragging graduates back down to earth. ...

As long as you avoid rare, demanding paths like engineering and pre-med in college, you bask in the warmth of a four-year vacation. If that's "socialization," it's dysfunctional socialization. [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 64-66]

7 "Child labor has not always been thought of as an evil. There have been times when it was treated as unpleasant to the child, but nevertheless desirable, somewhat akin to our contemporary view of education." [Kaushik Basu, "Child Labor," 1999] ...

Children with joy in their hearts don't belong in gray workshops, toiling all day long, cogs in the machine. They're kids, not robots! Well, unless the gray workshop is called a "school" and the cogs earn zero wages. ... When children languish in school, adults rush to rationalize. Making kids sit at desks doing boring busywork may seem cruel, but their pain trains them for the future. Why then is child labor so reviled? Toil may not be fun, but it too trains kids for their future. ...

When researchers compare working students to comparable nonworking students, work has a clear upside and no clear downside. Early job experience has durable dividends, boosting postgraduation earnings by 5, 10, or even 20% for at least a decade. The link between work and academic success, in contrast, is weak. The same goes for crime and other bad behaviors. According to one intriguing study, looser child labor laws cut education *and* crime; locking work-oriented students in school makes them "act out." ...

[S]chools should make educated guesses about future career opportunities, measure students' aptitudes, then expose them to plausible occupations. Instead of viewing

youth employment as "exploitation" or a risky distraction from school, we should celebrate work as vocational education in its purest form. ...

Visualize a world where academically uninclined preteens look up to apprentices instead of delinquents. Visualize a world where students find their lessons either practical or interesting. If we could raise a new productive, independent, engaged generation, wouldn't that be a great improvement over the bored, infantilized youth of today? [Bryan Caplan, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money*, Princeton UP, 2018, pp. 230-231, 237]

8 In 1964, the sociologists Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler surveyed 3,100 American men about their jobs and found that the key to understanding which jobs were satisfying was what they called "occupational self direction." Men who were closely supervised in jobs of low complexity and much routine showed the highest degree of alienation (feeling powerless, dissatisfied, and separated from the work). Men who had more latitude in deciding how they approached work that was varied and challenging tended to enjoy their work more. When workers had occupational self-direction, their work was often satisfying.

More recent research finds that most people approach their work in one of three ways: as a job, a career, or a calling. ...

You might think that blue-collar workers have jobs, managers have careers, and the more respected professionals (doctors, scientists, clergy) have callings. Although there is some truth to that expectation, we can nonetheless paraphrase Marcus Aurelius and say, "Work itself is but what you deem it." Amy Wrzesniewski, a psychologist at New York University, finds all three orientations represented in almost every occupation she has examined. ...

The optimistic conclusion coming out of research in positive psychology is that most people can get more satisfaction from their work. The first step is to know your strengths. ... If you *can* engage your strengths, you'll find more gratification in work; if you find gratification, you'll shift into a more positive, approach-oriented mindset; and in such a mindset it will be easier for you to see the bigger picture—the contribution you are making to a larger enterprise—within which your job might turn into a calling. [Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, Basic Books, 2006, pp. 221-222]

9 It is clear that, contrary to popular wisdom, most jobs are intrinsically rewarding. In other words, work usually provides the same kind of enjoyment as sports, games, music, or painting. This is true not only of elite professions such as surgery or management, where workaholism is most rampant, but also of such maligned jobs as assembly-line work or filing. True, most of the time when people work they do not realize that they feel better than when they are not working; they are too busy waiting for the day to be over so they can go home.

The reason work is intrinsically rewarding is that jobs are like games. They have clear goals and rules. They provide feedback about how well we are doing. They allow us to match our abilities with challenges. They make it possible for us to concentrate, to become so involved that the problems of daily life are no longer on our minds. They give us a sense of control together with a chance to forget ourselves temporarily. These are the most important reasons that people enjoy playing sports, music, or slot machines, and why many people feel compelled to work sixty hours a week or more. Work's game-like qualities make it less of a paradox that most jobs provide more rewarding experiences than many leisure activities in which one has no clue what to do or how well one is doing. [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*, Basic Books, 2000, p. 12]

10 When the child sees only the material rewards from work, he or she has no way to understand how work serves essential social needs and fulfills our personal sense of purpose. The obfuscation of work's deeper meaning is a breeding ground for apathy and cynicism, because without a positive grasp of its social and personal importance, the child will acquire a view of work as merely an unpleasant but unavoidable burden. ...

[I]t is not at all obvious to children that their parents actually take pride in contributing to the world. Children may not even realize that their own healthy growth is a source of satisfaction to their parents—and this, in a very real sense, is a central part of the work of homemakers. Such feelings of pride in work must be expressed and discussed in vivid detail if children are to understand them in all their depth. This requires a frank and open disclosure of the parents' true feelings about their own purposes in life. Parents who confide in their children about such matters serve as compelling role models. [William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*, Free Press, 2008, pp. 146-147]

11 Choosing a life's work that is fulfilling and rewarding is a major problem in our society where the things one has and the style one displays are celebrated more than the quality of what one does. Do you work to get stuff, or have you given up the vision of affluence, ease, and "styling" in order to pursue more fulfilling though financially less rewarding ways of being in the world?

Every young person has to confront this choice and, unfortunately, decent advice that validates inner needs and helps them shape a tailor-made future is not easy to find. [Herbert Kohl, *The Question is College: Guiding Your Child to the Right Choices After High School*, Times / Random House, 1989, p. 39]

12 [In our purpose intervention to motivate young people,] we ... informed kids that "making money in the future was hardly ever the only reason—or even the main reason" why students worked hard in school. Instead, we said, most students said they also work hard for personal reasons such as becoming an educated person who has something intelligent to say about what's going on the in the world, wanting to learn so they can make a positive contribution to the world, or having the freedom to pick the life they want to live. ...

Our purpose experiment showed that if you encourage a meaningful purpose for learning—one that involves both contribution to others and the status and respect one can gain from having stronger skills—then you can motivate young people to show the discipline and hard work that adults usually fail to see when they follow a conventional approach. [David Yeager et al., "Boring but Important: A Self-Transcendent Purpose for Learning Fosters Academic Self-Regulation," 2014] quoted in [David Yeager, *10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*, Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster, 2024, pp. 222-225]

13 The world is full of jobs that hold no intrinsic interest or pleasure. We seem to be adapting our schools to this dullness in life. By compelling our students' attention to subjects which hold no interest for them, we, in effect, condition them for jobs they will not enjoy.

People are always saying to me, "But how will your free children ever adapt themselves to the drudgery of life?" I wish that these free children could be pioneers in abolishing

the drudgery of life. [A. S. Neill, *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, 1960, St. Martin's Press, 1992, p. 43]

14 Young people entering the job market should have a known, trusted measure of their qualifications that they can carry into job interviews. That measure should express what they know and are able to do, not where they learned it or how long it took them to learn it. We need certifications, not degrees.

Certifications already exist. Examples include bar exams, board certifications for medical specialties, and journeymen's tests for various crafts. For our purposes, the most applicable certification is the CPA (certified public accountant) exam. ... The CPA exam score does not completely eliminate the importance of the BA or of the school where it was obtained, but it goes a long way toward leveling the playing field. ...

Under a certification system, four years is not required, residence is not required, expensive tuitions are not required, and a degree is not required. Equal educational opportunity means, among other things, creating a society in which it's what you know that makes the difference. Substituting certification for degrees would be a big step in the right direction. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, pp. 156-158]

15 What can schools do to moderate the competitive scramble for grades? This scramble is activated largely by the fact that too many individuals are chasing too few positions at the top of the occupational ladder, such that 80 percent of our young people aspire to 20 percent of the available jobs (Covington, 1992; Paterson, 1956). This mismatch is driven in part by positive factors—by youthful exuberance and the natural desire of individuals to excel. Unfortunately, it is also propelled by wishful thinking and ignorance, and sometimes by parental pressures even when the children's interests and talents may lie elsewhere. ...

[W]e argue for providing students with sufficient information and self-understanding to make informed judgments about which kinds of jobs would be most meaningful to them personally. Among other things, this involves helping students assess the risks, challenges, and satisfactions associated with different careers and encouraging an understanding that occupational satisfaction depends largely on matching job demands with one's interests, personal styles of thinking, and tolerance for risks (Andrew &

Grubb, 1995; Spenner, 1985). [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 251]

16 Mr. Dewey wants to concentrate on the study of occupations because he thinks that they will arouse real interest and lead to real learning. But the interest of the young in occupations is neither intense nor permanent, except in the case of an individual with a very special, overwhelming bent, until the time is almost at hand at which they have to make up their minds about the choice of their careers. Even then they can learn little about them until they have engaged in them, as the apprentice does, under the conditions under which they are carried on in the world. They cannot understand them; least of all can they understand their social and economic and political contexts, until they have had some experience as wage earners and citizens. I say again that imitation experiences in the classroom are not a substitute for actual experiences in life. Such experiences can lead only to illusion: they lead the pupil to think he understands something when he does not. [Robert Hutchins, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, pp. 13-14, https://archive.org/details/greatconversatio030336mbp/mode/2up]

17 [B]y and large our economic society is *not* geared for the cultivation of its young or the attainment of important goals that they can work toward.

This is evident from the usual kind of vocational guidance, which consists of measuring the boy and finding some place in the economy where he can be fitted; chopping him down to make him fit; or neglecting him if they can't find his slot. Personnel directors do not much try to scrutinize the economy in order to find some activity that is a real opportunity for the boy, and then to create an opportunity if they can't find one. [Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society*, Vintage, 1960, pp. 28-29]

18 [In] our generation ... full entry and submergence into the adult world is delayed until the early or mid-twenties, and in increasing numbers of cases, until the thirties. ...

Too long a disengagement from society ... may cripple young people's ability to become engaged ... to develop the enduring commitments and readiness for work that are essential if youths are to become adults. ...

What young people may need, therefore, is the chance to break out of the constraints that keep them disengaged, without sacrificing the stage of youth altogether. As Peter Drucker suggests, they need opportunities "to do what the child of yesterday did without special efforts: to work with adults as a young adult," ... And that means that we must "build exposure to areas of experience and performance" as part of the normal process of growing up; "we must make it possible for the young person to test himself in work." [*The Age of Discontinuity*] [Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education*, 1970, Vintage / Random House, 1971, pp. 117-119]

19 Intellectual confusion exacts its price. We preach the virtues of hard work and restraint while painting utopian pictures of unlimited consumption without either work or restraint. We complain when an appeal for greater effort meets with the ungracious reply: "I couldn't care less," while promoting dreams about automation to do away with manual work, and about the computer relieving men from the burden of using their brains. ...

Many have no desire to be in [the production stream], because their work does not interest them, providing them with neither challenge nor satisfaction, and has no other merit in their eyes than that it leads to a pay-packet at the end of the week. If our intellectual leaders treat work as nothing but a necessary evil soon to be abolished as far as the majority is concerned, the urge to minimise it right away is hardly a surprising reaction, and the problem of motivation becomes insoluble. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, p. 266]

20 [T]he modern economist has been brought up to consider "labour" or work as little more than a necessary evil. ... Hence the ideal from the point of view of the employer is to have output without employees, and the ideal from the point of view of the employee is to have income without employment. ...

The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give man a chance to utilize and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence. ... To organize work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking for the worker would be little short of criminal; it would indicate a greater concern with goods than

> with people, an evil lack of compassion and a soul-destroying degree of attachment to the most primitive side of this worldly existence. Equally, to strive for leisure as an alternative to work would be considered a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic truths of human existence, namely that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure. ...
>
> [T]he Buddhist sees the essence of civilization not in a multiplication of wants but in the purification of human character. Character, at the same time, is formed primarily by a man's work. And work, properly conducted in conditions of human dignity and freedom, blesses those who do it and equally their products. ...
>
> If a man has no chance of obtaining work he is in a desperate position, not simply because he lacks an income but because he lacks this nourishing and enlivening factor of disciplined work which nothing can replace. [Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, 1973, Harper / Perennial, 2010, pp. 57-59]

Related:
– How does our culture view college and vocational choices? How does this effect our systems of education?
– Why is it important for young people to take on responsibility? What opportunities do they have for substantive responsibility?
– What is the reality of the university?
– Strategies for Cultivating Vocation

37. How can praise for being smart affect students?

1 A child who is constantly admired for a particular skill frequently becomes less interested in trying out new things. One of the costs of such an attitude is that children begin to play it safe and in the process lose their willingness to experiment and challenge themselves. ... Seduced by the praise they have received for their ... skills, they shy away from exploring other interests. This constriction of thinking and activity works against one of the main tasks of childhood and adolescence—exploring a range of interests and abilities in order to find those that are a good fit. Sometimes we follow our strengths and sometimes we follow our interests. They are not always the same. [Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 143]

2 Given a new task, children praised for being smart tend to choose the easier alternative. In a meta-analysis of 150 praise studies, other scholars concluded that praise makes children averse to risk and decreases their sense of autonomy. These scholars found consistent correlations between repeated praise and "shorter task persistence, more eye-checking with the teacher, and inflected speech such that answers have the intonation of questions." And this finding begins to bring us back to college students angrily demanding that professors raise their grades: Researchers are discovering that the more children are praised, the more important it becomes for them to maintain their image. Their goal becomes to protect themselves, not to outshine others through superior achievement. [Charles Murray, *Real Education: Four Simple Truths for Bringing America's Schools Back to Reality*, Three Rivers, 2008, p. 130]

3 [I]t's very easy, as we try to express our pride and approval, to reinforce that message of *You are valuable to me because you are smart*.

In our current system of education, both gifted and good students are taught to rise to expectations. This may seem like sound educational practice, but not only does it train them to avoid failure at all costs (even when failure is the very best way forward into new ways of thinking and doing), but it traps them in an anxiety-inducing cycle in which one poor grade, one bad test ... seems like the end of the world. ...

> [T]he gifted and the good often hit their wilderness … at the point when they have to come face-to-face with the motivation for their goodness and achievement.
>
> And that motivation, often, is: They're terrified.
>
> They are afraid that they will fail. They are afraid that, when they fail, everyone will realize that they're *not* actually all that smart. They are afraid that they are not worthy of love. *That* is the peril of the gifted and the good. [Susan Wise Bauer, *Rethinking School: How to Take Charge of Your Child's Education*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2018, pp. 74-75]

4 > Like my daughter, I was also a gifted child who did not like challenges. I suspect it was related to the fact that everyone always bragged to me about how smart I was, based on how quickly and easily I solved ordinary problems, instead of pointing out to me how interesting the various subjects were. So I got the idea that my self-esteem rested on always getting everything correct instead of learning the fun of exploring new things. When things were not immediately clear to me it threatened my self-concept as a smart kid. [Moira, parent, quoted by Susan Wise Bauer, *Rethinking School: How to Take Charge of Your Child's Education*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2018, p. 77]

5 > A lazy child, unless his laziness is a direct attack on his parents and teachers, is almost always an ambitious child who is afraid of defeat. *Success* is a word that everyone understands differently, and it can be astonishing to find out what it is that a child regards as a defeat. There are many people who think themselves defeated unless they are ahead of everyone else. Even if they are successful, they consider it a defeat if someone else has done better still. A lazy child never experiences any true feelings of defeat because he never faces a real test. He avoids problems and postpones the decision on whether to compete with others. Everybody else is fairly sure that if he were less lazy, he could overcome his difficulties. He takes refuge in that blissful daydream, "If only I tried, I could accomplish anything." Whenever he fails, he can diminish the importance of his failure and keep his self-esteem by saying to himself, "It is only laziness, not lack of ability."
>
> Sometimes teachers will say to a lazy pupil, "If you worked harder, you could be the brightest pupil in class." If he can gain such a reputation by doing nothing, why should he risk it by working? Perhaps if he stopped being lazy, his reputation for hidden brilliance would come to an end. He would be judged on actual accomplishment, not

on what he might have achieved. Another personal advantage for the lazy child is that if he does the least bit of work, he is praised for it. Everyone hopes he is at last starting to mend his ways, and is eager to encourage further improvement, even though the same piece of work from an industrious child would not even have been noticed. In this way, the lazy child lives on the expectations of other people. [Alfred Adler, *What Life Could Mean To You*, 1931, Hazelden Foundation, 1998, pp. 138-139]

6 Among ways to restore pride ... is losing interest in all situations or people who in some way hurt this pride. Many people relinquish their interests in sports, politics, intellectual pursuits, etc. because their impatient need to excel, or to do a perfect job, is not satisfied. The situation then may become so unbearable for them that they give up. They do not know what has happened; they merely become uninterested, and may instead turn to an activity which is actually beneath their potentialities. ... Such changes in attitudes also are relevant to the learning process. [Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, 1951, W. W. Norton and Co., 1991, p. 104]

7 [E]ffort becomes what Carol Omelich and I have called a "double-edged sword," that is, trying hard is valued by students because teachers reward it, yet trying hard is also feared by students given its potential threat to their worth should they fail.

Self-worth theory contends that the protection of a sense of ability is the student's highest priority—higher sometimes even than good grades—so that students may actually handicap themselves by *not* studying in order to have an excuse for failing that does not reflect poorly on their ability. [Martin Covington, *The Will to Learn: A Guide for Motivating Young People*, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 16]

8 What is the purpose of praise? As with the use of rewards more generally, the real point often turns out to be a matter of benefiting the giver rather than the recipient. If we praise people, they are more likely to do what we want, which is not only advantageous to us in itself but also confers on us a sense of power. People whom we praise may come to like us better, too—another significant inducement. ... Clearly, it is worth reconsidering the use of praise if it turns out to be something we need to say more than something they need to hear. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 97]

9 The desire for approval is very nearly universal in young children. ... We have an enormous responsibility not to exploit it for our own ends.

Praise, at least as commonly practiced, is a way of using and perpetuating children's dependence on us. It gets them to conform to our wishes irrespective of what those wishes are. It sustains a dependence on *our* evaluations, *our* decisions about what is good and bad, rather than helping them begin to form their own judgments. It leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will lead us to smile and offer the positive words they crave. [Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Houghton Mifflin, 1993, p. 104]

10 Extreme depreciations of the child morally and intellectually, and sentimental idealizations of him, have their root in a common fallacy. Both spring from taking stages of a growth or movement as something cut off and fixed. The first fails to see the promise contained in feelings and deeds which, taken by themselves, are uncompromising and repellent; the second fails to see that even the most pleasing and beautiful exhibitions are but signs, and that they begin to spoil and rot the moment they are treated as achievements. [John Dewey, "The Child and the Curriculum," 1902, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, edited by Reginald D. Archambault, 1964, U of Chicago P, 1974, p. 346]

11 In schools ... we find that tests are given to determine how smart someone *is* or, more precisely, how much smartness someone *has.* ... But this seems to me a strange conception ... I do not know anyone who *has* smartness. The people I know sometimes *do* smart things (as far as I can judge) and sometimes *do* dumb things—depending on what circumstances they are in, how much they know about a situation, and how interested they are. Smartness, so it seems to me, is a specific performance, done in a particular set of circumstances. It is not something you *are* or *have* in measurable quantities. In fact, the assumption that smartness is something you *have* has led to such nonsensical terms as *over-* and *underachievers.* As I understand it, an over-achiever is someone who doesn't *have* much smartness but does a lot of smart things. An underachiever is someone who *has* a lot of smartness but does a lot of dumb things. [Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Vintage, 1995, p. 175]

12 There was one more finding in our study that was striking and depressing at the same time. ... [W]e gave students a page to write out their thoughts, but we also left a space for them to write the scores they had received on the problems.

Would you believe that almost 40 percent of the ability-praised students *lied* about their scores? And always in one direction. In the fixed mindset, imperfections are shameful—especially if you're talented—so they lied them away.

What's so alarming is that we took ordinary children and made them into liars, simply by telling them they were smart. [Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006, Ballantine / Penguin Random House, 2016, p. 73]

13 When people with the fixed mindset opt for success over growth, what are they really trying to prove? That they're special. Even superior.

When we asked them, "When do you feel smart?" so many of them talked about times they felt like a special person, someone who was different from and better than other people.

The problem is when special begins to mean better than others. A more valuable human being. A superior person. An entitled person. [Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006, Ballantine / Penguin Random House, 2016, p. 29-30]

14 We agree that just telling a kid "you're so smart" is not such a good idea, in part because no one is smart in every skill area. ... However, we all want our kids to think they're intelligent, and if they struggle in school, we want to reassure them even more. It's not so great for kids to think that they aren't so smart or, worse, to think that they're stupid, which is the case for a lot of kids ... Also, studies have shown that for Black students, many of whom have never been told that they're smart, simply telling them they are is one of the most powerful ways to improve their academic performance. So when Bill works with kids who doubt their ability, he doesn't lay on praise about their brilliance—for one, they probably wouldn't believe it. But he does tell them a greater truth: that they are "smart *enough*" to do something useful and important in this world. ...

When Ned gets kids who cling to the idea that they're stupid, he will say, "I'd like you to be open to the idea that you are really quite capable. It may not seem that way to you

> now. And you don't have to change your mind. I'd just ask that you keep an open mind because that's certainly the way that I see you. ...
>
> "You're smart enough to do what you want to do as an adult. ... [Y]ou're smart enough to learn skills that will allow you to make a living and to make a positive contribution to this world. From my point of view, that's the most important thing."
>
> We also believe that it's important for kids—and especially teenagers—to be aware of their strengths, including the things they're naturally good at. For many kids, being told that they have talent in a specific area or that there's something they can do a lot better than most kids their age is enormously motivating—and gives them the confidence to stretch themselves. [William Stixrud and Ned Johnson, *What Do You Say?: How to Talk with Kids to Build Motivation, Stress Tolerance, and a Happy Home*, Viking / Penguin Random House, 2021, pp. 112-113]

Related:
– How can parents improve their influence on their children?

About Me



Hi! My name is Thomas Cook. I grew up and live in the South Bay. I have a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from UC Irvine. And I've been studying education since 2007.

My interest in (and around) education began in college at a career fair. A veteran engineer happened to ask me a question that struck me as odd: "Do you enjoy your classes?" No one had asked me this before, nor had my experience taught me that it was particularly relevant. Yet upon reflection, I realized that, yeah, in the real world of work (and life), it's probably important (to you and those you work with) that you actually enjoy what you're doing (most of the time)—that you have the kind of motivation that comes from genuine interest, that you aren't merely passing the hours, indifferent.

This prompted some further reflection. I realized that a lot of energy was dedicated to getting me into college, and little to what I would do once I got there. I recalled that the first time I was really confronted with the choice of a college major was when filling out college applications (that this didn't seem negligent at the time was also striking to me). Similarly, much consideration went into the price of my college tuition, but little into whether I was prepared to derive justifiable value from it.

I wondered about the educational circumstances that brought this about. I started reading. And what I learned revealed much about myself, the educational needs of individuals and society, and how well (or poorly) these needs are met. Not only did I find the content of what I studied eminently valuable, I also became familiar with the methods of self-directed learning which I think are equally critical (for a proper lifelong education and all of its benefits).

This website addresses many of the educational needs I found most pressing and most under-served. It's the achievement I am most proud of; and, I hope, a product of autonomous learning that might inspire students. No AI was used in its making; I've hand-curated each quote in the Discussion Materials, and all the other writings are solely my own.

Since I began learning about education I have yet to stop, nor do imagine I will; the subject is too vast, and too desperately (and perpetually) relevant. I'm grateful to have found this object of study, which has given me an important measure of purpose and fulfillment. I hope I can, through this course, help students find their own "guiding center" that will give them direction and meaning—that will bring them closer to themselves and the world. I hope that when asked, students can say they enjoy whatever they chose to study (this course included). And I hope my enjoyment of what I've learned, and an intellectual life in general, comes through in all that I do.

Contact

Whether you have a question about the course, a thought you'd like to share, or would like to arrange a meeting, I'd be glad to hear from you.

Reach out to me here: www.TheRoE.org/contact