

The Forgotten Role

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Language is an amazing thing. Yes, we use it (or try to anyways!) on a daily basis - but sometimes the true meaning and context of words gets lost in the cultural usage of the word. Let's face it - language is only as good as our understanding of the words we use. I've found it helpful to, at times, go back to a dictionary and revisit the true definition of a word and the context in which it is relevant.

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Here's a recent example from the annals of my world:

edÂ·uÂ·caÂ·tion â€œ noun:

1. the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.

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Interesting concept.

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Education is about teaching people how to think.

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Sounds rather obvious, doesn't it?

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So you're telling me that education is not about "jumping hoops"? It's really about learning and reasoning and intellectual discussion? I'm not sure that's the cultural context that many have grown accustomed to over the years.

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In our world now, schools teach students less about the "why" and more about the "what". This isn't exclusive to any particular type of education - I think we see it everywhere. Just have a conversation with the next high school senior that crosses your path and you'll see a reflection of this.

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It's all about completing assignments ... getting a grade ... getting into college ... getting a degree ... being successful ...

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But in the midst of all of this, are we doing a good job at truly educating people? I am left to wonder - especially after my trip to the dictionary.

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Now I am probably the last person that considers myself "old school" - especially as it relates to school! But what I've found throughout various levels of education - public, private, professional, and otherwise, is that there is one "old school" property that has been oft-times forgotten. The forgotten role of education - is making students think, fostering an environment for them to be challenged, to push the envelope of their thought process, to truly experience learning at it's most elemental level.

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My best teachers created that environment.

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Yes, I could formulate a list. Norie Spence. John Ballachey. David Poulter. These are but some of the people that challenged me, engaged me in the active learning process, and made me a better thinker because of it. And the "thinking" isn't just about the topics they taught. They provided me with an environment in which I could refine my powers of reasoning and judgement - which extends to all facets of my world.

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Norie Spence - one of my high school teachers - had the ability to see what was then a budding interest in biomechanics - and foster it. She inspired me to forge ahead, to learn more about the biomechanics of sport, to explore my passionate interest in the topic. Then, after I had graduated with my PT degree, invited me back to my alma mater as a coach - of a sport of which I knew little at the time - because they needed a coach and she knew I could "figure it out" because of my knowledge of sports biomechanics.

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[side note - it was javelin and yes, I figured it out. After working with my version of the "Bad News Bears", they all had a lot of fun and great mechanics in the process!]

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I think back to grade 11. Remember Sam Kinison's role as the teacher in Rodney Dangerfield's "Back To School"? Welcome to John Ballachey's Asian History class. John, I can only thank you (and admire you) for this - because in the rants and discussions I learned more about the world than you could possibly imagine. Oh and I learned a little about Asian history too ...

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In more recent times, I ponder my McKenzie diploma training. David Poulter got me to push the boundaries of what I thought was possible - as a clinician, as a human - which had a dramatic impact on how I view the world, let alone patient care. I won't ever forget one of those "teach-able" moments in which I had just done what was, to this day, one of my worst teaching presentations ever - and David managed to make it not only a learning experience for the clinician in me,

but a learning experience for life.

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I wish I could say that my university professors had the same level of impact on my thinking. But by this time, I think that I was starting to see the development of what we now consider the "world of education".

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I've seen "higher education" turn a blind eye to the research (and on more than one occasion) - then in the same breath continue to claim that their students graduate practicing "evidence-based practice". Worse yet, I've watched those new graduates go on to teach "techniques" that have little to no support in the scientific literature. But hey, it's continuing professional education ...

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I've watched "the system" foster an environment in which students are more concerned about the grade than actually having an understanding of what it is they are studying. These are typically the same students that end up "jumping through hoops" because it's expected of them - whether it fosters their learning or otherwise.

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And I am sure we've all seen high school students graduate without being able to read or write (or if they do, they speak in "text message" and write that way as well - but that's another cultural debate I am sure).

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These are not isolated incidents - unless I have a charmed existence and have been so fortunate to witness them.

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Are the real goals of education being accomplished in our current system?

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Education is about having an impact on a person's life and learning. It is about interaction, about exploration, about insight and thinking. Hopefully it's not one that drains the lifeblood out of their desire to explore their world, to learn, to think, to reason ... and to make the world a better place.

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