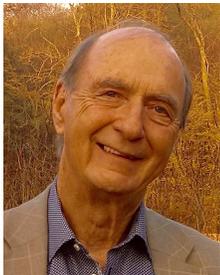


Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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The Joy of Learning



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I was asked at a recent education conference to talk about joy in learning. I found myself startled by the question; I had never heard anyone talk about the joy of learning at school. Sure, my parents frequently asked about my scholastic efforts and interests, but scarcely, “what did you find joyful in school today?” So, the question invited a stroll through distant memories. When, if ever, did I find such joy? Two memories took shape. Interestingly, while the first occurred when I was an adolescent and the second in graduate school, they had a certain similarity: In both cases a teacher had expressed special interest in something I had written. In both cases, a turn in the relationship ignited interest, curiosity, and pleasure in learning.

A more profound question now emerges: why don't school systems foster the kinds of relationships that contribute to such ends - to a love and joy of learning, and indeed an appreciation of the potentials of relationships themselves? In my view, our major practices of education largely have the opposite effects. If my major responsibility as a student, is to learn material of someone else's choosing, and with little relevance to my life, I may well respond with sullen resentment. If grades and tests are then used to force my participation, with failure casting me as “a failure” to all concerned, my resentment may be layered with fear. If my relations with my classmates are also structured as a competition for “a successful future,” the layers are thickened by distrust. Except for a small group of “insiders,” I am alone.



We must recognize that the ingredients of this alienated world of education - standardized curricula, top-down pedagogy, testing – are all byproducts of a century-old image of schools. It is an image that in many ways resembles a factory. The young are raw material, schools shape them into a standardized product, and testing ensure quality control. And then, of course, there is the market, where test scores serve as capital. The system not only fails the new generations, but poorly prepares us for a future in which global well-being will depend on innovation, improvisation, and collaboration.

And now to the present: Recognizing the failings of this tradition, educators from around the world have responded with fresh ideas and innovations. A range of new practices is emerging, one that recognizes the central place of relationship in the educational process, and the critical need for education with better promise for global well-being. It is precisely such advances that will be centrally featured in the Taos Institute's upcoming virtual conference, [Education as Relating](https://www.taosinstitute.net/education-virtual-conference2021), Nov. 4-6, 2021. This event will include over a hundred presentations, workshops, and focused dialogues, proposed by educators, scholars, and students from around the world. There are topics of interest to all concerned from education, from childhood and beyond. It is a conference devoted to shedding the industrial model, sharing practices and resources, and shaping the future of education. See details at: www.taosinstitute.net/education-virtual-conference2021. It should be an inspiring event. No longer should a question about one's joy in education be a surprise, but perhaps an invitation to endless story telling.

