

Life long learning is a phrase being tossed around these days. The National Learning Foundation is promoting the term *Agile Learners* to signify a shift in emphasis from content to process in the educational community. Develop a lust for learning and content will take care of itself. Imagination is more important than knowledge.

In preparing for an interview with George Leonard, author of *Ecstasy in Education*, *The Ultimate Athlete* and most recently *Mastery*, I came across a story of a wise man who came to a Zen master hoping to learn the secret of becoming even more wise. The Zen master said nothing as he prepared a pot of tea. He began filling the wise man's cup. He kept filling and filling until it spilled over the brim and still he kept pouring. An empty cup can hold something new while a mind that is full usually ends up making a mess.

In our last interview David Bohm pointed out that knowledge is not intelligence. Any response from memory is based on the past, which is repetitive and mechanical and a mechanical process is not intelligence. What a simple concept. The original response now stored as memory may have been the result of intelligence, but the brain froze this into a limited pattern and in the process rendered it unintelligent.

History repeats itself and the expectation is that a past intelligent response may be useful in the future - and it often is. Memory is a wonderful thing. Our challenge is to recognize the implicit limitations of the past when it meets the present. Learning is this act of intelligence, immediate, dynamic and alive. Learning is an act, which changes the learner. As Leonard points out, *learning can be ecstatic*.

Knowledge of every kind, however, defends itself. We feel secure when we "know" and insecure when we don't. Looking back, one can trace how our life was transformed from one of wonder, curiosity and ecstatic learning to one of "conditioned - secure knowing" through formal schooling, mostly. For some strange reason we then build a strong psychological attachment to our knowing, to our test results and score card. To question the need or appropriateness of all we have accumulated is to challenge the very core of our being - at least, that is how it feels.

To learn the mind must be free. It is only the free mind that can hold or perceive something new, while the mind that is full sloughs around and usually ends up making a mess. Discovering the essence of inquiry, of life long learning, is essential in a world awash with content. This doesn't mean that we suddenly go catatonic, or stumble around in some blind state of amnesia. It means simply that we suspend our fixed assumptions and beliefs. It means that we create a mental state that is free to look, to feel and to listen. Deep questions take on new significance in such a state.

Do you remember, as a child, asking deep questions: How high is up? What would happen if you dig straight through the earth? What happens when we die? Young children live in a state of ecstatic inquiry. They simply don't know and are eager to learn about themselves, the world and their place in it.

Ask a question, any question and watch what happens. The brain/mind leaps into action, searching its memory banks, looking for an appropriate response. The more we "know" the more sophisticated, complex and sure our response will be. Rarely do we say, "I don't know." The unknown is uncomfortable. We rush to fill the void. This becomes our habit and habit kills inquiry - it prevents ecstasy, it prevents learning.

The work we do in our *Touch the Future Dialogues* has a great deal to do with discovering the essence of inquiry, for oneself and as a group. When two or more gather the lightening fast response of memory, to every conceivable question, creates friction. One person's response bounces off another, triggering yet another, usually mechanical response. One of the great difficulties in such a group is suspending the knee-jerk reflex of the past so that questions can sink deeply. As soon as the brain/mind provides an answer, right or wrong, it snaps closed, snoozing in its cozy self-made sanctuary.

It is amazing how well trained we are, so eager to respond instantly to the challenges we face. Years of so-called education has confined us to very narrow and well marked patterns. Rather than encouraging change, which is the essence of learning, parents and educators most often prevent children from changing in any deep or meaningful way. The conditioning runs deep. The last one to raise his or her hand must be dull or stupid.

I met Janet at a symposium hosted by Fritof Capra on the use/abuse of computer technology in education. As a Native American, she described how her community responded to the computer challenge. Was this technology good or will it bring them harm? Like young children, they simply didn't know. The question was raised and held by the community. There was no rush to respond. Weeks or even months went by and it was decided that one of them, a sensitive one, would infect himself with this new technology in order that they all may discover what this new technology was really all about.

More months passed. They held the question, which began to reveal new insights. Had content or information been their only criteria, the inquiry would have unfolded very differently. Theirs was a deeper question. How would this technology affect their spirit, their relationships to each other, to their children and to the land?

What impressed me greatly was the way each individual and the community held the question allowing it to resonate for weeks or even months before the mind wrapped itself around a conclusion, before intelligence, with its inquiry crystallized into a belief, a conclusion, a habit.

True freedom is freeing the mind from the absolute authority of what we think we know - including what we think of ourselves. This requires great strength and security, not often found in tiny bits of data, but in a security grounded in intelligence, in that infinite sea of life churning beneath the superficial surface of our minds. This freedom can only come into being when there is absolutely no fear, no need to prove, defend or justify. This freedom cannot exist when we are being graded, judged, punished or rewarded. Play, as our *Intelligence of Play* project points out, implies this freedom. Our interview with Barbara Findeisen shows how early this expansive, ecstatic state of learning is crushed.

Only in complete freedom can the body, mind and emotions have integrity. With integrity comes increasingly sensitive, wholeness and therefore - intelligence. Discovering and developing this sensitive intelligence in ourselves and sharing it with children, creates a completely new and radically different relationship to information and to knowledge. Knowledge then takes its place, serving our common intelligence rather than the other way around.

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