

**Learners Unlimited
Invitation from John Vasconcellos
June 29th, 1989**

Friend -

I invite you personally to participate in an ongoing conversation & brainstorming process regarding developing and legitimating an urgent basic California public agenda regarding

LEARNING!

George Brown and David Boulton and I began this process the weekend of June 9-10 in Santa Barbara - & hope to expand our conversation to include other concerned persons and to continue so long as necessary to enable us to unlock the secrets of human learning & in particular, the obstacles thereto!

George Brown is:

- a long-time friend and ally,
- a UCSB pioneering professor of education,
- a Gestalt therapist,
- a cofounder of Confluent Education (which is an administrator and teacher education doctoral and masters' program designed to enable an educator to develop within him/her self and as well within his/her students a confluence of cognitive and affective capacities),
- whose work played some part in the awakening of the leaders of Poland's Solidarity movement several years ago.

David Boulton is:

- a new friend and ally,
- inventor of a proposed 'learning book' intended to truly facilitate individualized learning on an inexpensive mass scale,
- committed especially to searching out the very roots of our innate human learning capacities and processes and the obstacles which keep us from realizing our learning potentials.

Our several conversations during the course of these two days led me to compose the following proposal for our own agenda:

A. I began to develop a clearer sense regarding how we can describe the urgency of our situation in such terms that it becomes clear and recognizable to every body, and in particular the persons with the most influence (including, increasingly, California's business leaders) on our public education system - so as to get everybody to join us in going past the band-aid surface symptomatic reforms and proceeding to the very heart of our human learning problem and challenge:

- (1) - The overall failures of our schools;
- (2) - The enormous illiteracy rate of our people and workforce;
- (3) - The changing demographic character of our work force & our especial need to find out how to arrest the terrible dropout rates amongst certain groups;
- (4) - The growing need for lifelong learning - since the average person will be changing work/careers 4 times during his/her working life; &
- (5) - The changing needs of our society -
 - (a) - from the industrial age with our manufacturing society need for trained clones to operate our factories -
 - (b) - to the information age with our societal need for creative individuals to keep us at the frontier of technology and competitiveness;
- (6) - A major access point is becoming our economic system and business sector and business leaders -

B. David proposes that we owe it to ourselves to self-consciously and openly address the very most basic questions (which always serve to inform our pedagogy, teacher training, curriculum development, etc.) - and he proposes the following basic answers:

- (1) - What are our beliefs about the nature of the learner?
 - (a) - That we human beings are innately learning beings who (barring some obstacle) would automatically learn all that we need to know to live meaningfully and productively and with satisfaction!
- (2) - What are our beliefs about the nature of learning?
 - (a) - That we are always learning, in every instant and situation! - and
 - (b) - That in each moment what we learn is a result of the convergence of the real situation in which we find ourselves, our innate capacity for learning, and our state of being on account of all our prior learning!
- (3) - What is the most basic purpose of the educational system and process?
 - (a) - To develop our appreciation for learning and our capacity for learning!
- (4) - What are the obstacles to our so realizing our innate learning capacities?

C. In addressing the 4th question, it came clear to me that we have three particular most basic questions to ask ourselves, to discover the operative answers for:

- (1) - What is the primary experience through which we learn - not to learn?
 - (a) - i. e., what experience causes us to shut down our innate spontaneous learning capacities?

(b) - How does the mechanism of nonlearning come to be in us?

(2) - What is the mechanism whereby we maintain our shut down nonlearning?

(a) - Where is it precisely located within us; &

(3) - By what process can we address and resolve (erode, melt, shed) our internal mechanism for nonlearning?

D. David proposed that we need to develop a schema whereby we figure out the most appropriate and effective curriculum - which is the best teaching tool/technique -

(1) - human teacher,

(2) - technology,

(3) - textbooks,

(4) - experience, etc. - ?

E. For each of the respective learning developments which we seek to facilitate:

(1) - Information;

(2) - Skills;

(3) - Understanding; &

(4) - Creativity.

G. George and David and I agreed that we would convene a group of pioneering persons from various human frontiers to brainstorm these questions and to design a strategy for advancing the state of our knowledge with respect to these questions & their answers -

(1) - beginning with a weekend workshop, perhaps at Esalen, this fall (2) - and continuing on a sustaining basis -

H. The persons we initially proposed to be included are:

(1) - George Brown, David Boulton, John Vasconcellos, Judith Brown, Brian Murphy, Stanley Keleman, Lou Pambianco, Sasha Shulgin, Michael Murphy;

(2) - I would propose the following persons be considered as well - Jack Canfield, Bert Bowers, Sandy Astin, Steve Scheier, Mitch Saunders, Tom Peters, George Leonard, Janet Lederman, Pat Callan, Mario Chacon, Bill Honig, Jonathan Kozol, Doug Stone &

(3) - I would suggest as (at least) members of an advisory team to review our progress
- Gary Hart, Becky Morgan, Bill Leonard, Sam Farr, Delaine Eastin, Jack O'Connell,
Avram Goldstein, David Barram, John Whiteley, Jim McGaw, Herb Carter, Doc Howe,
Joe Alibrandi, Marty Covington, Larry Wilson, Bob Suzuki, Don Johnson, Uvaldo Palomares,
Mike Kirst, John Heider, Harve Bennett, Ken Druck.

I am enclosing David Boulton's **LEARNINsiGhts** paper to provide you a particular sense of the path we are committing ourselves to and embarking upon.

I invite your response and critique, and especially your indication of whether you want to participate in our pioneering and hopefully historic endeavor.

I wish you well. Let me know if/when/how ever I can help.

John Vasconcellos