

# Epilogue

## The Closing Argument

“Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.” A free man is one who refuses to bow to the coercive structure of bad alternatives and instead criticizes the situations produced by these coercive structures with the aim of changing them. *Theodor Adorno, as quoted in Camus (Blackwell Great Minds) by David Sherman.*

David Sherman, through Theodor Adorno, suggests individuals should seek alternatives to untenable and unproductive situations imposed upon them. Throughout this book I have been critical of the standardized, mass-production education systems that I had experienced both as a student and a teacher. During the participatory years of my formal education I bowed to the authoritative learning structures and practices of education, placing fault on my learning abilities and not on the education system. It had never occurred to me that the education system’s instructional methods were incompatible with the way I learn; neither could I see nor understand that my dilemma was shared by others.

The educational system is a product of our society’s values and must take a utilitarian approach that maximizes social welfare by successfully educating the greatest number of its population. This requires conceptualizing a cognitively malleable universal student and developing instructional strategies and standards that will effectively educate the largest number of students to meet the set educational standards and the productive needs and values of the sponsoring society. Utilitarianism, I concede, is possibly the only approach a mass production education system can take. Unfortunately, the system neither holds itself accountable to nor fully recognizes the diversity of learning styles of individuals and, consequently, faults individuals for not fitting into the desired production system’s standard universal student product model. An individual’s self-concept is tied to recognizing and being recognized by peers, teachers, and others. Failure to be successful within this educational model negatively effects self-image.

Learning is an individual experience, and according to Howard Gardner’s theories on multiple intelligences, each individual has a learning style attuned to a specific intelligence. The implication is that all individuals have the capacity to learn, although differently, and education should be an act of consequentialism, where the effectiveness and success of teaching methods and practices are determined by the consequences they produce in a student’s learning achievements or failures.

Utilitarianism is meant to serve the greater good of society, not the good of all. Therefore it reflects education’s limitation in educating individuals who do not match the system’s desired cognitive profile. Consequentialism may be impractical in a mass system, which means the utilitarian system of education must share in the acknowledgement and responsibility of the learning failures of individuals who do not fit the narrow parameters of the system’s instructional methods and practices.

My combative dialectic emanates from being labeled and subjugated by a system that did not acknowledge or fulfill my learning needs or requirements. Education is essential for everyone; however, it must be realized that a mass educational system is designed with a cognitive bias and thus is incapable of educating everyone in accordance with their learning interest, intelligence and priorities. Therefore everyone is personally responsible for their own education. Educational systems offer what Nietzsche

terms indigestible knowledge stones, otherwise known today as prescribed content knowledge, which is often meaningless to an individual's learning interests. The universal application of education is what makes compulsory education such a suffocating experience for some individuals. When the methods and content of compulsory education are ineffective and irrelevant for individuals, then the task of learning must be assumed by the individual. Learning is an individual act, however it requires cooperative thinking from an external instructional source. An individual must take the initiative to search for essential learning opportunities and sources that will help to maximize and realize their cognitive and productive potential.

In this book I have presented individuals, some considered geniuses, who hadn't fared well in systemized learning institutions. The examples I provide, along with my own experiences, are meant as testimonials to the ineffectiveness of the methodology used in standardized education. Individuals who fail or succeed in compulsory education are not unique. Individuals must come to understand their own cognitive profile that includes an intelligence that determines both how they learn and their learning priorities.

I would define "formal education" as accrued, accredited learning within the artificial circumstances of a predetermined curriculum regulated by a specified time and place. I think of learning and the acquisition of knowledge as an experiential, organic, process directed by individuals' curiosity, motivated by their learning interest, and based on their specific intelligence. The learning experience begins with the first breath and ends with the last. Nietzsche defines learning as a journey without boundaries or time constraints, and without a known destination, effectively educating based on individual needs and eliminating the unusable and unwanted content knowledge often prescribed by accredited education institutions.

In the documentary *Ivory Tower*, Harvard president Drew Faust professes her belief in the Liberal Arts Education as giving students the ability to think, reason, and question for a lifetime. Those ideals had not been my experience in compulsory and post-secondary education. I learned to think, reason, and question in two distinct symbol systems through my own self-directed education. I have discarded most of what I was taught through formalized educational systems and replaced it with what I had learned through journey and experience, which proved to be a much more effective process. Once I had made the permanent move from teaching in public to private schools, I was no longer bound to the non-productive, time consuming, nuisance of teaching recertification requirements that were primarily designed to aid non-artist teachers to perform objectified production tasks of project based (learning) activities. Teaching in a private school allowed the freedom (of choice) to pursue my own learning interests and professional development. Thomas Wolfe, in his novel *You Can't Go Home Again*, states that he was never interested in degrees or awards; he was interested only in learning, for which he felt college too inadequate to fulfill his learning needs.

There is no denying education is essential for everyone, but it is fair to criticize the inviolable educational institution's attitude that aims to make its systematic educational programming into the absolute and only sanctioned means of learning. More and more individuals are questioning the effectiveness and validity of higher learning institutions. The race for credentialism and the pursuit of prestige by learning institutions has contributed greatly to the unprecedented rise in tuition, which has reduced the viability of an education to a commodity: cost versus product. The old style 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century hierarchal learning institutions can no longer afford their self-deification of "what is" is "what ought to be." Individuals are increasingly looking for a more open, individualized approach to

education. The documentary *Ivory Tower* gives experimental examples of the Un-college, a technology-based learning communal environment, and MOOC, Massive Open Online Courses sponsored by Stanford University, and Ed X, sponsored by MIT and Harvard. Technology is changing education, and the more interactive technology becomes, the more individualistic education will become. Regardless of change to educational systems, the responsibility of education will always remain an individual's choice. What the changing educational structures and systems will offer is more and hopefully better choices so individuals may design learning programs tailored to their intelligence type and learning interests for a specific domain discipline.

Finally, as I am reading and participating in the final editing of this book, I am able to see what my editor, Ms. Harrison, former English teacher and now high school principal, has done and know that it is correct, while not understanding the structural concepts that make it correct. Similarly, if Ms. Harrison drew a self-portrait and I edited it, she would recognize the corrections but not understand the structural concepts that make it correct. We are both exercising our intelligences; the difference is that, in our educational system and society, Ms. Harrison is acknowledged as being intelligent and I am presumed to be talented, rather than intelligent. In our educational system and society, there is no distinction between intelligences, and Ms. Harrison's linguistic intelligence is valued over my spatial intelligence.

As a visual art teacher, I am forced to acquiesce to education's biased linguistic symbol system to justify my visual symbol system program. What is forgotten in arts education is that some of our culture's greatest artists were educated in the apprenticing institutions of guilds and master's studios, where objectives were visual and not written. Apprenticing students were evaluated solely on visual performance and not on how visual notations translated into word objectives. When art education was co-opted into the current systematized word-prejudiced learning institutions, visual learning and instruction became subservient to the linguistic word-symbol system.

The practice of teaching art requires visual presentations that include visual objectives. A visual lesson, as presented in chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11 seldom can be administered and presented through the use of words. In comparison to visual images, words are too abstract to be able to articulate visual objectives. Mostly what words achieve in arts programming is creation of the pretense of learning that provides the educational sanctuary necessary for visually unskilled art teachers. In our school systems, this predigested value system translates into poor educational opportunities for artists in programs, and by instructors that are misunderstood, under-utilized, and under-valued. Art teachers will remain second-class citizens (and many deservingly so) in scholastic institutions operated by the visually illiterate who believe in the myth of talent over the reality of multiple intelligences.

"Poets are not academic people... they're really against what the academic people do... they are people who discover things for themselves... who burst through and make another world... and the academic people cannot understand them." Thomas Wolfe.