

than on the 'subject-matter' at hand. However, it is dangerous to say that it is **not** about the tools. It is more about the tools than we might think. Tools shape behaviours, cultures, classrooms, schools & contexts.

Seymour Papert said, "It is a self-defeating parody of scientism to suppose that one could keep everything else, including the culture, constant while adding a **serious computer presence** to a learning environment. **If the role of the computer is so slight that the rest can be kept constant, it will also be too slight for much to come of it.**" Indeed, if we want the culture & context of the classrooms to change then let's **explicitly embrace** how technologies might impact this change.

Let's focus on Khan Academy. As a virtual tool it can be used to supercharge the physical classroom. In 10 years it has uplifted humanity. This true story should help us to understand why tech needs to be embraced: One student told Khan, "I just want you to know that I had dropped out of high school twice when I was a freshman. School didn't gel with me. Then I found Khan Academy and it allowed me to re-engage with a lot of the stuff that used to frustrate me. I went back to school and learned two years of math in two months. I went back and not only caught up, but I ended up graduating as valedictorian, got into Princeton, where I am a computer science major, and I just applied for an internship at Khan Academy."

Online education is the Hole in the Wall.

Unlocking the power of new technologies for self-guided education is one of the 21st century superhighways that need to be paved. Profound changes to how children access vast information is yielding new forms of peer-to-peer & individual-guided learning. The cloud is already omnipresent & indestructible, democratizing & ever changing; we need to use it to spark the imaginations & build the mental muscles of children. We need a pedagogy free from fear and focused on the magic of children's innate quest for information & understanding.

Brick #6 EDUCATE THE PUBLIC

We spend so much time educating students but we do a terrible job at 'public relations'. What is the role of the PTAs...is it to hold BBQs? The public has really no idea what teachers do. It seems that until there is **wide acceptance of new ideas in the general public, things don't change a great deal.**

Only a small number of the very complex array of bricks have been addressed that stand in the way of educational change. There are many more...it's for the teachers to come out with the rest. Through deep conversations, we can construct new understandings & progress towards **'tearing down the wall'**.

Importance of a Teacher: Unless the teacher has

some knowledge of the potentialities of the child they cannot go ahead with their task. Educational psychology is the application of psychology & psychological methods to the study of development, learning, motivation, instruction, assessment & related issues that influence the interaction of teaching & learning. Educational psychology helps the teacher to understand the child: i. Interest, attitude & ability; ii. Stages of development linked with physical, social, emotional, intellectual & aesthetic development; iii. Level of aspiration; iv. Conscious & unconscious along with the subconscious behaviour; v. Motivational behaviour.

Jerome Bruner, an enduring figure in educational psychology, noted the need to rethink our ideas of development, teaching, and learning and the interactions among them. Specifically, Bruner urged educators and psychologists to **see children as thinkers** & stated: No less than the adult, the child is thought of as holding more or less coherent "theories" not only about the world but about his/her own mind and how it works. These naive theories are brought into congruence with those of parents and teachers **not** through imitation, **not** through didactic instruction, **but by** discourse, collaboration & negotiation. This model of education is more concerned with interpretation & understanding than with the achievement of factual knowledge or skilled performance.

A good teacher...Gibran's powerful words: If the teacher is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. Einstein: "It is the supreme art of the teacher to **awaken joy** in creative expression & knowledge." The one who undertakes the instructions of the young, undertake a great responsibility. They must therefore be as tender to their pupils as if they were their own children. They must correct moral lapses through hinting; above all they themselves must set an example so that their actions accord with their precepts. **The teacher should never be critical.**

Great teachers are able to take subjects and instill life and excitement to the topics. They must adapt their teaching to the pupil's capacity & ability, & not overburden them. They must respect the less gifted pupil. And after school the pupil must be allowed to have recreation. To prevent play and insist on **continuous study leads to dullness in the heart, diminution in intelligence & unhappiness.**

Al-Ghazali in *Ihya ulum al-din*, says the teacher carries eight duties. First and foremost they are the parent for the pupils. They must teach for the sake of God. They must advise the student with prudence, fight the excessive urge to learn too quickly, and to overtake their peers. They should **reprimand with moderation**, in private, discreetly, **not in public**. To blame too much is to make the pupil too stubborn in their way of seeing and doing things. And one

other duty of the teacher is to make sure that what they teach they pursue in their life, and that their own acts do not contradict what they are trying to inculcate.

There is no substitute for excellent teaching.

Foster the belief that competence or ability is a changeable, controllable aspect of development rather than a question of innate talent or intelligence. Focus on encouragement rather than praise & stress the merits of effort & persistence. Supportive relationships with students are based on a commitment to student learning & faith in their ability to learn, but also includes constructive feedback about learning that provides helpful guidance and builds a realistic but confident sense of self-efficacy.

The challenges call for rebuilding the structure of our educational program on such a foundation as to fulfil our spiritual as well as temporal obligations. We need an education system which can produce a spiritual philosopher, spiritual scientist, spiritual economist, spiritual jurist, spiritual politician, spiritual executive. Spiritual experts are needed in all fields of knowledge who would reconstruct the social order in accordance with the tenets of God's Laws.

All of the above bricks applies to the madrassas. They operate in the lamest fashion possible...in the false belief they are teaching religion...**another brick in the wall!**

Muhammad (p) encouraged the studying of foreign languages, and thus Zaid bin Thabit learnt Persian, Greek, Ethiopian, Aramaic & Hebrew. This begs the question: In which madrasa is to be found such vast linguistic learning?

According to H. Barnes in *A History of Historical Writings*: "In many ways **the most advanced civilization** of the Middle Ages was **not a Christian culture** at all, **but rather the civilization of the people of the faith of Islam.**" Here's why...A man came to Muhammad (p) and asked, "What is *ilm* (knowledge)?" He replied, fairness (*insaf*). "And what more?" He replied, listening (*istima*). "And what more?" The Prophet said, remembering (*hifz*). "And what else?" He replied, acting (*amal*) in accordance with knowledge. "And what more?" Muhammad replied, spreading it (*nashru-hu*).

Such comprehensive spiritual wisdom. Wisdom being the acme of strength demolishes all walls of resistance! Walls, like idols, must fall, for truth has come & stupidity, like falsehood, must flee. Educational innovations are **not to be feared, but embraced.**

Finally: We can make changes in our homes. We need to remind ourselves that our children's success as healthy, independent, contributing adults does **not** hinge on attendance at any particular school. We help our children succeed, in fact, by providing them with a healthy balance of time, space, encouragement, and an emphasis **not** on the building of resumes but on the discovery of their own interests & values. Let them know that their health is more important than any exam. Transformed parents, transformed teachers...leads to transformed students.

Is this what **Childhood** has come to?



Another Brick in the Wall

ARE GRADES THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF A CHILD'S WORTH?

The documentaries *Race to Nowhere*, *Waiting for Superman* features the heartbreaking stories of students who have been pushed to the brink by **over-scheduling, over-testing & the relentless pressure to achieve**. It points to a silent epidemic in schools. Through the testimony of educators, parents & experts, **it reveals a system in which cheating is widespread; students have become disengaged; stress-related illness, depression & burnout are rampant; & young people arrive at college & the workplace unprepared & uninspired**. Whatever you undertake to preach or teach in this world, **learn first to be**. Unless a teacher's theories permeate their whole being, they are of **no value** to the world...a brick in the wall.

What transforms education, is a transformed being.

Supportive relationships between teachers & students create safety & provide encouragement but they are **not uncritical**. In fact, constructive feedback – in both directions – is an essential feature of a healthy relationship, but the **manner & spirit** of that feedback determines whether it **enhances** or **undermines** the relationship. There are other **'bricks in the wall'** that block quality educational change. But...

To be or not to be, that is the question.

In Pink Floyd's power-driven, throbbing, 1979 rock opera "Another Brick in the Wall" the lyrics caught afire in the minds of many children: It was a Protest song against RIGID schooling & against teachers who "lord" it over children. When we grew up & went to school There were certain teachers who would Hurt the children in any way they could By pouring their derision Upon anything we did And exposing every weakness However carefully hidden by the kids We don't need no education We don't need no thought control No dark sarcasm in the classroom. Hey! Teacher! Leave them kids alone! All in all you're just another brick in the wall.

The **spiritual poverty** of much contemporary education provides few opportunities for today's youth to quench their deep thirst for meaning & wholeness. **Wrong education deforms society...it's a demonic power...**as the song says. Seek knowledge! Educate yourselves! That was the first blazing instruction by God. **Iqra!!!** And then a crushing rhetorical question: "**Are those equal, those who know & those who do not know?**" (39:9) A society that loses its respect for the sacred, that ignores God's Word & severs itself from the power of human imagination, ensures its obliteration. To understand God's **WORD** we must understand God's **WORLD** by studying the sciences. There is **no division** between the secular & the spiritual. We need an holistic approach.

The Prophet's exhortation: "Seek knowledge from the cradle **to the grave**" means that school is only a narrow slice of a child's life. The kids are whole when they arrive at a school's doorsteps – and come with a full life replete with desires, passions, problems, issues, excitement...& confusions. Teachers need to deal with the whole child. **No dark sarcasm!** We don't need to spark creativity & wonder in children, **that is natural**. What we need to do as educators, is to figure out **how to stop putting that spark out**. To keep them whole.

THE **WALLS** WE ALLOW IN OUR LIVES ARE MADE FROM **BRICKS OF IGNORANCE**

Do not teach using the cold, clinical language of science & reason alone. Speak in the nebulous language of love, tenderness, patience, redemption & forgiveness.

Reason makes possible the calculations, science & technological advances of industrial civilization. But reason does not lift us upward to the heavens. It does not bring us into contact with the sacred. It does not permit us to curb our self-destructive urges. Only a spiritual education does that.

Only large-minded & great-souled people should ever dare think of instructing children. Only the sincere, honest & generous hearted should dare teach anything. The moment a person announces that they are a teacher in any department of life, they indicate the idea of a certain superiority. It should be their aim to live up to that idea. Every teacher is an architect who is set to the task of perfecting the rough statue. Whatever their strong point is, they must build their whole life up to harmonize with it. If a person is gifted or skilled in some one line, other things are to be demanded of them in other respects. To whom much is given, of them **much is required**.

Schools today are the product of an expired age; standardized curricula, outdated pedagogy & cookie cutter assessments are relics of an earlier time. Schools operate as if all knowledge is contained in books & as if the salient points in books must be stored in each human brain – to be used when needed. The political & financial powers controlling schools decide what these salient points are. Schools ensure their storage & retrieval. **Students are rewarded for memorization, not imagination or resourcefulness.**

Memorize that vocabulary, **not** how to use it. Memorize historical occurrences, **not** their significance and implication for the future. Understand those chemical formulas, and remember them, but **don't** try to apply them to discover something new. Math...memorize again but let's **not** study or explore what you do with math. Memorize the Quran but do **not** establish justice. Just do it.

If you were taught English or Math but NOT taught to ask philosophical or critical questions then you have NOT been properly educated. **Quality education is essential**. This simple personal, economic and societal **truism** has become a rallying cry for a host of innovations & initiatives.

Brick #1 PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

"We want students to be 21st century learners!" This is a common call to action from educational leaders.

However, all administrators & leaders (never mind the teachers!) should be 21st century learners too! If all educators aren't there, it is unlikely that all students will get

there. The sad part is that many of those advocating this idea are actually **not** practising it. But they know the language – but have no visceral knowledge.

Education by example: "O you who believe, why do you say what you do not do. **Hateful in the sight of God is that you say what you do not do.**" (As-Saff 61: 2-3)

Educational leaders now have to deeply immerse themselves into the 'participatory' culture of the Internet in order to legitimately understand & promote it. They must also develop an authoritative stance on the **pros/cons** of the issues & concerns related to the 'always on,' 'over-connected', 'superficial' aspects of life in the Web world.

If you are teaching music, you can never attain to absolute success, no matter how great your knowledge of the technique of music may be, or how skilled you are as a performer, if your life is out of key with the universe.

If you are instructing the young in mathematics, look to it that your life is well regulated, and that your thoughts have order and system.

If dancing & graceful posturing of the body employ your time, cultivate grace of mind & mental attitude toward your fellow-beings.

If you are training the human voice to express eloquence, let all your daily actions be expressive of eloquent sympathy and love for humanity.

Brick #2 SUSTAINING MYTHS

Educators are living on a diet of abstracts, one-line wisdoms from Twitter & drive-by professional development: "Kids don't need to memorize anymore, they can just Google it". "Students should be in charge of their own learning." "Lectures are bad pedagogy." "It's not about the technology, it's about the learning." "Multitasking is a 21st century skill we must all learn."

There have been many discussions with education leaders about the danger of popularizing these simplistic, decontextualized one-line wisdoms. We understand the intention underlying these statements but they may lead to **malignant misinterpretation** by those new to the profession.

The current nature of information science & media causes people to be reading snippets rather than long texts that provide greater depth, context & nuance.

These abstracted one-line wisdoms do NOT serve us well in the reconstruction of the education world. But, they will continue to be present & prolific so use them as a springboard to deep, meaningful conversations. Educators should be able to **authoritatively** discuss issues such as multitasking, shared leadership, technology supported

knowledge construction, how to distill lessons to their core so students learn everything about one thing quickly.

Brick #3 EDUCATE... DO NOT SUBJUGATE

From Plato to Aurobindo, from Vygotsky to Montessori, centuries of educational thinking have debated a central pedagogical question: *How do we keep the sparks of creativity, curiosity & wonder in children burning?* When we have engaging & thoughtful explorations & conversations about the context in which we are providing education, we begin to prepare the soil for the harvest ahead. On this fertile conversational ground, our innovations take root, our insights bring water & nourishment, & quality leaders at all levels can bring a bountiful harvest home. Not only do students learn more effectively, educators also learn & are better prepared for even more transitions.

If we want students 'in charge of their own learning' then embrace a culture where teachers are empowered to be in charge of theirs as well! **When teachers are treated as pawns they don't teach, they become drill sergeants**. We need education for our students & ALSO for our teachers – not subjugation.

Brick #4 WE ARE FEROCIOUSLY FICKLE

We 'surf the surface'. We talk about 'collaboration' – and so we build collaborative tasks. We speak of 'inquiry' – and so we have kids generate 'essential driving questions'. We speak of Project Based Learning (PBL) – and so we have kids 'do projects'. Along comes Design Thinking, or the Third Teacher, flipped classroom, 'maker' movement, or backward design, & teachers are expected to hop on this next train. It's a fast & furious world! We inundate teachers with new initiatives. It is difficult for them to manage. They become discouraged. Disempowered. These initiatives should be applauded. Note, they are parts of the whole. It is important to help teachers to understand the 'essence' residing in all these practices. Out of the distilled essence, teachers could then 'construct their own knowledge & practice' – the same as we wish for our students.

Brick #5 IT IS ABOUT THE TOOLS

One of the 'myths' is that, 'It's not about the technology, it's about the learning'. It arises from focusing on the skills required to use the tool rather

TO WHOM **WISDOM** IS GRANTED INDEED SUCH A PERSON RECEIVES AN OVERFLOWING BENEFIT

Quran 2:269

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