

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

Establishing a Global Culture of Learning

(Original)

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If our increasingly interconnected world is to become a true global society, we need a global educational network. Such a network could be an international tool for establishing and maintaining a global culture that is conducive to learning and celebrates the variegated heritages and arts of the world. Culture strongly influences individuals' beliefs and actions, leading persons to be more or less accepting of the 'different.' The culture that we need for a peaceful society, and that a global educational network could establish, is one of tolerance and curiosity.

The unit of this network is the Center, a community's learning and cultural hub. The Center is staffed with teachers trained and hired locally and globally who vary in expertise, though they do not simply lecture and grade. Instead, they encourage students to use learning resources and counsel students in solving intellectual, artistic, and personal problems. They do teach, but only when students request them to. Learning at the Center is self-directed, and the golden treasure for an independent student today, and for one of the Center, is the computer. The Center supplies lots of them, all connected to the Internet and thus the world.

Let me demonstrate how the Center works through a child first entering it. That child is a young toddler, mature enough to independently explore his surroundings. Children begin their education at the Center as early as they can play, for they learn much through play. Think of Sugata Mitra's Hole in the Wall project, in which kids at play *taught themselves* to use computers and browse the Web.

The child enters the Center with a caregiver and is awed by his new environment. People – children, teenagers, even some adults – are in clusters absorbed in discussion that occasionally crescendos to almost a roar. Some read books, some fiddle with models or

building blocks, some converse online with those of other cultures. Some also are outside, examining critters, watching clouds, playing ball, climbing trees.

Many schools today unfortunately treat education as something serious, a program of necessary skill-building for one's future. Yet the students of the Center, absorbed in a global culture valuing thought and imagination, are all playing, even the adults, and are all learning. The human propensity to be creative and curious is not crushed.

After recovering from his awe, our child at the Center approaches a group clustered around a table. "What are you doing?" he asks.

A student answers, "We're studying mathematics. We're examining various ways to find the area of a circle and are debating which one is most bizarre and elegant. I like Archimedes' method – how imaginative to turn a circle into a triangle!"

The group then asks a teacher to show them more. The students were not drilled on one formula for the area of a circle; rather, they were appreciating mathematical thought. Teachers and students treat academic subjects not as skill sets to master, but as intellectual arts to 'practice' like one practices medicine. Students may also explore other aspects of culture such as music and religions and actively practice them, if they desire to – and in the culture of learning the Center establishes, many will.

Our child will be required, as all students are, to spend some hours at the Center every day for a certain number of years. Sometime during this study, he will be sent abroad to experience and learn from another culture, increasing his empathy and clarifying his view of persons and peoples. The child 'graduates' from the Center when he finds a calling to fulfill, and if he leaves, he may return later to learn more. The essence of an ideal education is to learn and formulate one's role as a thinking and feeling human in global society.

The modern world is one of ideas, and the creative and spiritual traditions of the globe are for all to share. If we make self-directed learning the cultural hub of communities through a global network of Centers like the one I have depicted, we unlock a world more tolerant of innovation and more celebrating of thought.

This is my dream, a currently far-away ideal – but it lives in the realm of possible.