

Introduction to Lifelong Learning

It is optimistically projected that the youngest generation will be a powerful force in entrepreneurial enterprise, sustainable innovation, social tolerance, and technological navigation. It is quite possible that this upcoming group of primary- and secondary-school attendees will eventually be building their own education, deciding their collective curriculum, and self-pioneering their way into unconventional careers. This is reflected by the consistency and fluency with which young people – ‘millennials’ and the following generation, the ‘digital natives’ or ‘NetGens’ of Generation Z – source and share information digitally. What has dawned upon people in this ultra-curricular atmosphere of image, knowledge, and general data churning is the consent to participate. We are attentive to our areas of investment, and can rather easily filter through and prioritize particles of information to suit our preferences. We click on the headlines that pique our interest, and we share the content that reflects our priorities. We scan hundreds of keywords per day and build an internal database of current events, image/text memes, personal photos, etc. from which we continually and actively adjust our personal perspective. This initially private and majorly spiritual style of knowledge procurement is sustainable, collective. Additionally, the abundance and variety of messages and opinions reaching any individual assures that a certain type of discerning intelligence is exercised. The individual can quickly visualize, at large, what is on the social radar among other demographics, and to furthermore establish him/herself among a demographic with an awareness of its preferences and sensibilities in relation to another.

The spirit of this generation is one of individual free will, albeit geared towards locating placement within a global community. These youths are quite prone to innate realism – they’ve been born into the noisy, frenetic mad-dash to save the earth from climate change, and from deadly racism, and from nuclear fallout, and from population strain – but they’re still told that anything is possible. Perhaps more than ever, the errs of humanity’s ways are at least made objectively apparent, if not personally relatable, to those paying attention to social media feeds. With this, and with the vibrancy of their digital encounters, plus the old-hat method of public schooling via antiquated textbook via feed-and-regurgitate, the

newest generationals may have no more efficient a choice than to treat their experiences as a buffet. They might pick and choose appropriate portions of applicable hors de oeuvres from the open data stream and garnish it with standard theorems learned in the classroom. They might then access strains of innovation that are philosophically novel and completely derived from personal circumstance, but that are drenched with the superlative possibility of having widespread impact.

Take, for example, the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge of summer 2014. Within a matter of three weeks, the viral fundraiser had accrued over \$70 million for the foundation. About 1.5-2 weeks into the do-gooding, people were informed that the game was rigged by CEOs and that the entire world is running short on potable water. Soon, even those who could not resist the challenge supplemented their contribution with donations to water.org or, like the .org's celebrity cofounder Matt Damon, reconfigured the constraints and – for example – used toilet water to complete the challenge. Thus enters the individual ability to quickly assert influence, to customize outcome, and to raise alternative awareness. Additionally, the challenge itself was a clearly inclusive gesture that, whether malicious or well-intended, touched the most vulnerable soft spot of viral form.

If education could bring this viral excitement into its curriculum and link online behavior with the environment of the institution, it could present a novel technique for confronting educational activity with more directed specificity and individual interest. It would allow young learners to more efficiently access and prioritize the information available to them in order to, perhaps, shorten the distance between initial excitement into a topic or field of study and the ability to manifest a constructive personal effort towards such field of study.

With this in mind there still exist, as Tony mentions, outside constituents to which we are still held accountable. Since means of funding for either a) higher education or b) mobilization of projects comes from private organizations, even the zealous young entrepreneur must jump through the hoops put in place by private – and often corporate – lenders and benefactors to achieve personal goals.

Here, Tony Chrenka fantasizes an environment for learning that encapsulates a hypothetical convergence between corporate privatization and alternative learning institutions during a global adaptation to self-catered education. The

structures of the educational furniture suggest a pseudo-diy modularity that can be disassembled, modified, and customized to optimize the experience of what Chrenka dubs *Lifelong Learning*. He seems to project a future in which education, beginning in childhood, will be far less linear and standardized than the majority of current education systems, particularly public institutions within the United States.

The language used in his allusion to blurbs in a wholesale product brochure, or perhaps idioms adopted from institutional information pamphlets, is clever in inviting positive reciprocation between the learners, or investors, and the education they will receive with their *lifelong* commitment to the product that is, in essence, *themselves*.

As a result, we can peer into the dark chasm into which the terms 'individual' and 'corporation' both fall from either side. When corporations are treated as individuals, and vice versa, it traps the conversation of investment in a region that contains an indivisible dualism: that of the uplifting, personally fulfilling holistic goals of spiritual invigoration, and that which is completely animated by the movement and eventual pooling of capital. When education admits (however directly) that it is not exempt from this dynamism, it makes sense to address the participants in like terms. *Investment, labor and capital* are terms that are often found together. *Heart* opens a valve of empathy and benevolent imposition, which presents an unconventional way to level the field between 'us' and 'them' and to bring everybody back into a nice Socratic get-together.