

A brilliant generation

Our children are the most tested in the world. Society has become obsessed with measurement. We have arrived at the stage where we are no longer willing to make a decision without the supporting evidence, even when it comes to our children. In fact we are at a new level of risk aversion where we are no longer willing to trust the means of measurement itself. We often read that employers are dissatisfied with the quality of students they employ and Dr. Richard Pike, the chief executive of the Royal Society of Chemistry, recently described GCSEs as 'meaninglessly easy'.

Despite these assertions the current generation of children and young adults continue to outsmart the system. They are absorbing, enhancing, employing and developing an era of technological change that is beyond the scope of any historical comparison.

It is interesting that so many children diagnosed (a medical term for measured) as having learning difficulties are more than comfortable in the new technological arena. They communicate and think in a way which is markedly different from previous generations, yet we insist on educating them with methods and content from an era which is dead.

Our educational system was designed in an industrial age. Taught in a linear manner, the objective is to process as many as possible to a standardised format as cheaply as possible. The fact is that we no longer live in an industrial society. Our children and young adults have grown up in a digital age. Their thinking is by necessity, and some would argue by design, non-linear. With the current speed of change, much of our curriculum, science in particular, could well be described as a history lesson.

Differentiation in the education system still occurs on the basis of being able to reproduce somebody else's ideas in the pressured environment of an exam. Only those who succeed within that system are entitled to pursue the luxury of free thinking at a higher educational establishment. With grade inflation, the right to free thinking is becoming ever more exclusive as degree level education becomes similarly standardised.

Ironically those still suited to the type of linear thinking and box ticking which affords them the greatest opportunity, and resources, are most likely to have difficulty in adapting to a rapidly changing real world. I believe our children are smarter, more adaptable and certainly more aware than any previous generation. I do not include intelligent because our desire for measurement has so limited the understanding of a word that I feel it is now redundant.

The reason so many children are perceived as a disappointment or are failing in school is not because they are stupid, lazy or naughty. It is because we are teaching them the wrong things in the wrong way. Add to this the fact that the techniques of measurement we use are similarly useless and a clearer understanding of the nature of the problem emerges.

The new world needs new thinking and the new generation are providing it outside the boundaries of education. These brilliant minds will engage when we make it relevant and give them the space to create in. We may not trust our own ability to assess someone without a certificate but let's allow the young to trust themselves. They may not leave education knowing the same things we were taught, but they will educate themselves in an awful lot more than we could ever have dreamed of.

Have you ever noticed that by the time you have mastered the internet your children are bored of it. Pleased with your first text message they are e-mailing. You master e-mail and they are on Face Book. You open your Face Book account and they are on twitter. We can't keep up and nor should we try. Neither should we hold them back by teaching them what is relevant to us. It no longer serves them. Our job is to create the environment and resources to allow them to lead us forward.