

How should we teach?

In [my last post](#)¹ I set out why I thought schooling as it currently exists is a problem. In this post I start to explore possible solutions - specifically by looking at how we ought to teach.

In order to understand how we ought to teach we need to understand how people learn - because teaching ought to enhance learning. I have [previously set out my views on learning](#)², but also summarising them here.

We all know about learning by being told (Figure 1) - it is the predominant form of how we are expected to learn in school.

Figure 1 - Learning by being told

How we learn (in school)

Learn ... by being told



We are also familiar with the idea of learning by doing, though in schools this is usually decontextualised (Figure 2). Taking a science experiment as an example, you can tell it is decontextualised because if a group doesn't get the results the teacher expects her reaction is unlikely to be 'Oooh that is interesting, let's investigate to find out what is going on'. She is much more likely to say 'Copy the results off the group next to you and write the experiment up for your homework.' That is not doing science - it is decontextualised - it is doing school science (a different thing entirely).

Figure 2 - Learning by doing in school (it's usually decontextualised)

How we learn (in school)

Learn ... by doing (decontextualised)

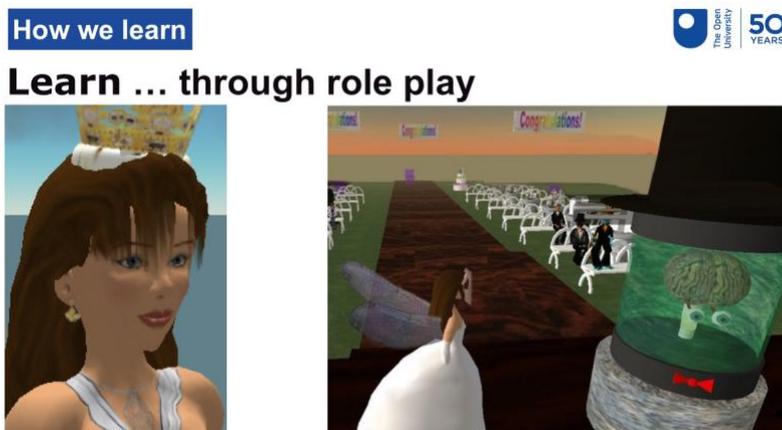


¹ <https://halfbaked.education/is-school-the-problem/>

² <https://halfbaked.education/what-do-you-mean-by-learning/>

Then we have learning through role play - something that anyone with an Early Years background knows all about. This was an important way in which members of [Schome Park](http://www.schome.ac.uk/wiki/Schome_Park)³ (an island in Teen Second Life) learnt. For example, some members of Schome Park pretended to get married (Figure 3) and there was a lot of learning involved in the process of organising the wedding(s) and associated discos.

Figure 3 - Role playing getting married in Schome Park



Part of why role play is important is that it allows us to prepare to engage with new activities and roles; it allows us to practice 'becoming'.

Learning by becoming is even more powerful than learning through role play, as I learnt from the Schome Park Programme. An island in Second Life can have a limited number of objects (prims) on it. If you exceed that number then everything grinds to a halt on the island. We exceeded the prim limit within a few weeks of starting the project (Figure 4). So the participants decided to set up a planning department to control what was built on the island. The planning officers came up with rules for how to get permission to build, and went around threatening to delete/remove any constructions that didn't have planning consent. There was nothing pretend about the reactions of people whose buildings were deleted! The planning officers were not pretending to be planning officers, they actually became planning officers. This was a very powerful learning experience for all concerned.

Figure 4 - Learning by becoming - dealing with there being too many prims on Schome Park



³ http://www.schome.ac.uk/wiki/Schome_Park

The importance of 'becoming' as a means of learning was further highlighted on [the NP3 project](#)⁴, which was focussed on young people's digital practices outside school and the extent to which these influenced pedagogy inside schools. For example, Rory, who was 11, was a gamer (Figure 5). He created mods for games and shared videos on YouTube of himself and his friends playing games. He was recognised as having a great deal of expertise. He was initially helped by his mum, who bought a book on how to play Minecraft and started to work through it with him. He quickly became more proficient than his mum, and started to learn from and with friends (who he knew in the physical world). Later on he started to interact with other gamers, who he didn't know in the physical world. Thus he was inducted into gaming, initially by his mum and then by interacting with other members of the gaming community.

Figure 5 - Rory who had been inducted into the world of gaming

NP3 - Rory



and from then onwards he developed quite quickly, and he left me far behind quite quickly I have to say. And then he met other children like Ashish who knew already a little bit more, and then he put that into practice. And yeah, it just went from there

(Interview with Rory's mum)



For example at the moment I'm building a town and a high school [in Minecraft], for a new YouTube series, which I'm starting with Ashish and Henry.

(Interview with Rory)

Similarly, Latifa who was a ten year old Somalian refugee, had become expert at creating video skits that she uploaded to YouTube (Figure 6). She had a sophisticated understanding of different YouTube genres and at how to engage people (including 'haters') in conversation about her videos. She had been inducted into the world of video creation and YouTube by her mother and siblings (all of whom were also YouTubers).

Figure 6 - Latifa was inducted into the world of YouTube and video creation by her mother and siblings

NP3 - Latifa



When I was like nine, I made these horrible videos, and it was on my old, old, old channel and it was on my mum's account. Let me find it for you [laughs]. It was really bad videos, like...

I only do it for fun, I don't do it for money because if you do it for money and fame, then you won't get any subscribers and people will know that you're doing ...



I'll do it myself, but like I'll go on the internet and I'll try and find it, like how to do it, and if it doesn't work, like usual because I can never do it properly, I ask my sister because my sister's a tech nerd too

... when I finish editing and import my videos, my mum tells me whether the video's good editing and good quality and if I should upload it or not

⁴ <http://edfutures.net/NP3>

Sadly, the key elements of human learning conflict with formal learning (as it typically operates in schools today) - as shown in Figure 9. This mismatch is a further critique of schooling - because teaching ought to enhance human learning rather than being incompatible with it.

Figure 9 - The contrasting elements of human and formal learning

What is learning?



	Human learning	Formal learning
Why	Pursue an interest - Achieve a personal goal	Qualifications
Motivation	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
When	Flexible	Timetabled
Duration	Over prolonged period	Limited time per 'topic'
Where	In context	Decontextualised
Who Teacher	'Club' members	More knowledgeable other
View of learner	Has expertise, lacks experience	Passive/'ignorant'
Role of teacher	Induct children into valued ways of being, orchestrating activities & connecting to mature practices in the world	Guide/scaffold (at best) Tell (at worst)
How	Becoming (role play)	Being told, 'doing', (role play)

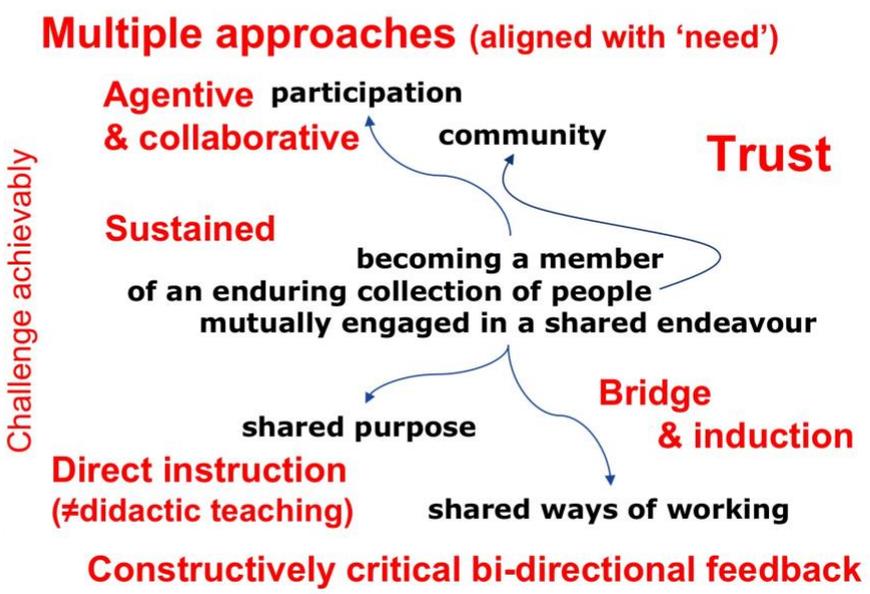
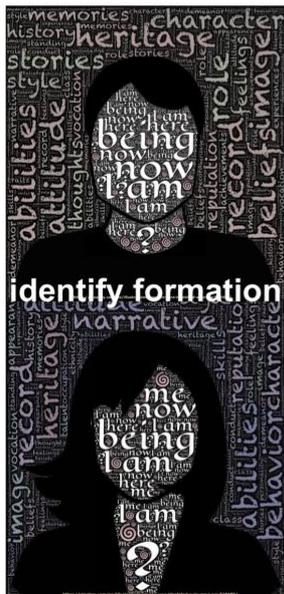
Adapted from <https://halfbaked.education/?p=63>

If we want teaching to align with human learning - so that it enhances it - then teaching should:

- involve multiple approaches - so that they are aligned with the needs of each individual learner
- be based on trust (in young people's desire and ability to learn)
- encourage constructively critical feedback, not just from the teacher to the learner but also from the learner to the teacher (so that her support for learning can improve)
- involve direct instruction - which is not the same as didactic teaching - both the learners and the teacher should have a shared understanding of why they are doing something (the purpose), what they have to do, with whom, how and when, as well as what success would look like. Importantly, the learner might decide these things, they don't have to be decided by the teacher
- recognise that learners are active participants - they should be supported in being agentive and collaborative
- the role of the teacher should be to help bridge the gap between the learner's current understandings and ways of working and the valued understandings and ways of working of the community; their role is to induct the learner into the community
- challenge learners so that they are stretched - whilst being realistic about what is achievable
- enhance each learner's self-efficacy, their belief in their ability to succeed
- be sustained; it's about depth not breadth

Figure 10 - Summary of the implications of human learning for how we teach

How we teach



This of course has implications for the curriculum - the focus of another post.

This blog post summarises part of my [OU inaugural lecture](#)⁵, which was delivered at the OU in Milton Keynes on the 25th June 2019.



Author: Peter Twining
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⁵ <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/events/if-school-problem-what-solution>
⁶ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>