

On the value of writing, learning cursive, and of learning skills in general

Written by Michael Martin, 2021

I feel that it is absolutely critical that there be a broader conversation in the development of curriculum not only for the 'practical' value of a skill, which is transient to culture values, but for the developmental value of skill training and education on a neurophysiological and philosophical level.

It is absolutely imperative that a revision of educational curriculum be evaluated in light of modern developmental biology and not purely in light of market projection for job availability. I would much rather see a society of competent, healthy, intelligent, and adaptable human beings capable of learning than to see an army of trained employees with extensive health problems.

Cursive is a primary example of this. The training of classical methods of writing have developed over a long period of experimentation and format the mind in a particular way. This is classically demonstrated with classical music training. The neurological configuration of classical piano is recognizable by brain scan without knowing previously if that person was trained in music or not. The extensibility of this principle has been demonstrated in other instances of tool use and more broadly can be taken to understand that education and experience or practice with a tool, methodology, or practice, formats and conditions the physical configuration and functions of the central nervous system. (See research by Nina Kraus on language, music, and the brain, her work regarding the development and structure of brainstem nerve networks is incredible, here is a video lecture on some of her research: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o64_SehTi6M)

With this understanding in mind, we can look at the value of learning cursive as actually learning to see the world through the eyes—and brain—of those who have learned and developed that skill before us. To have insight into the understandings of the past we must adopt the practices of the past and build upon them. If we read the writings of those who wrote, and most importantly, thought through cursive writing in pen and ink without understanding those skills then we lack a certain vocabulary and context for the pace, structure, and beauty of articulation that their thoughts have.

Language is one of the foundational skills and tools of being human. Written language and music are possibly, still, the most profound technologies that humans have. Mathematics and computation are both systems of symbolic representation that build upon these skills. The value of literacy in learning can almost never be understated. The ability to acquire those skills which enable further and future learning in an organized process which refines and improves skill and understanding is an essential foundation of education. (See the Englebart Institute for bootstrapping humanities potential, he was the inventor of the computer mouse, monitor, and GUI, he is an iconoclast of human and American innovation, thought, and potential of the 21st century, I can't recommend him enough: <https://www.doungengelbart.org/>)

Literacy is also one of the areas that America falls behind in. In fact, America tails in literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, and computer literacy; despite being the most powerful and one of the wealthiest nations of the last century. This is untenable, the politicization of education must come to an end. And it begins with mathematics, language, and music education in the schools, in the home, and in one's self.

I strongly encourage all students to be infinitely curious of the world around them. Never be satisfied with an answer that is provided to you. Be ruthless in your inquiry, question everything. Deception too is a hallmark of human evolutionary biology. Listen to and learn from but never settle for the understandings of others. Explore, know, and see for yourself what something is and

communicate that understanding with as much expression, grace, compassion, and eloquence as possible. Philosophy, epistemology, gnosis, and communicating understanding, sharing and receiving the lived experience of another, are some of the most beautiful experiences in life. To know a thing, one's self, or another, is an experience I wish upon everyone. I wholeheartedly agree that the unexamined life is not worth living.

To practice cursive is not simply to make shapes with letters, it is learning to listen to the minds, experiences, and cultures of all those who came before you and glimpse into the world which they found beautiful, enigmatic, perplexing, revelatory, and meaningful. It takes time to write something with elegance and practiced form. It takes considerable conditioning to understand what beautiful script, sentence, form, and thought are. It takes even more time to be able to produce elegant works.

Do not let the world rob you of your opportunity for beauty and meaning in your life. This is not a matter of talent. It is not a matter of gifts. Writing is not something only for poets and philosophers. It is used by everyone every day in our society and holds the potential to enrich anyone's life. It is a matter of curiosity, of beauty, of appreciation, and of patience. Elegance and skill in writing, music, sport, art, and life represent dedication and diligence to practiced forms. If it is worth doing at all it is worth doing well. Be patient, be diligent, you are your only barrier. In the world of information, we live in era flooded with resources for the improvement and development of self; use them and know for yourself what they mean, they are there for you to use.

I am an early high school dropout who has been self-educated and found the opportunities to pursue a life fueled by books, the Internet, and an unending scientific, anthropological, and existential curiosity. This would not have been possible without my very fortunate early training in literacy and writing. I am an avid bibliophile. Literacy has absolutely saved my life many many times over. My exploration of language and writing has undeniably shaped who I am and been a foundational point of reflection which I return to time and again. Without it I have no doubt that my life would have been lacking the depth, clarity, color, and rich complexity of thought and experience that I love dearly about being alive. My practice of cursive writing has given me awareness of the value of writing slowly and thoughtfully, of acting slowly and thoughtfully, and of knowing the difference in thinking fast and thinking slow (Thinking Fast and Thinking Slow, is a wonderful book by the way!)

To deny students the opportunity to know the thoughts and perspectives of their forefathers and ancestors is a deep transgression of ethics and an atrocity in my mind. To deny a human the opportunity to learn how to learn and how to communicate is to remove one of the very essences which makes us human. Please learn cursive, foster a love of knowledge, keep reading, keep practicing, and keep learning.

Happy hunting