Prepare for the Real Adventure of Life

iLearn University

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A University of Self-Design

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Dedication

To my journey mate,
Cathy,
whose loving support and understanding
were essential for our journey together.

To my daughters,
Heather and Christine,
who introduced me to the wonders of being a steward of
developing loving and capable human beings.

Prologue

We have been hearing for years about the demise of the education system and arguing about what we need to do to fix it. Experts jostle their way through the crowd, like shouting traders on the stock floor, arms and voices raised to gain attention over all others to pitch their latest solution. So far, our education system has continued to slide in spite of great and well meaning effort implementing several winning solutions from this shouting marketplace of eager experts. What is this continuing slide trying to teach us?

There are also many who speak not of a solution, but of a deeper paradigm shift that needs to happen with education. Some of my favorite YouTube videos featuring speakers on this dramatic need for a fundamental shift in education include:

1. **Do Schools Kill Creativity?** by Sir Ken Robinson. (http://youtu.be/iG9CE55wbtY)

2. **Changing Education Paradigms**, by Sir Ken Robinson. (http://youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U)

3. **Do It Yourself University**, by Anya Kamenetz. (http://youtu.be/i6MLLkmXee0)

After letting these videos sink into you for awhile, my question to you is what should learning look like for YOU?

Forget the experts, forget the deeply engrained and culturally shared image of learning in a classroom with rows of chairs all facing a teacher in front of a blackboard. I want to know what it might look like for you when learning is FUN, USEFUL, and MEANINGFUL to you.

Yes, I am actually asking. You may not know the answer to my question right now, but this book is all about providing you the structured support you need to engage in learning a

way that really works for YOU. Not what works for a teacher. Not what worked well for a hundred years to prepare a workforce for factory jobs. What will really help you prepare for a life you want for yourself and how will you best prepare yourself in a way that is fun and engaging for you?

Preparing for Feedback

I have read many books that teach from a place of describing the "right way" or "this is how everyone should do this." While I can respect that the author authentically sees their world that way, advocating for one right way, in my opinion, lessens the effectiveness of well-meaning teaching, and in the worst case, can cause significant damage to the student.

We are all wired a little differently than each other. We look at the world and construct our reality a little differently than each other. Some of us learn through our bodies, some through our eyes and minds, some through sharing stories and relationships. There are many ways of learning and many differences in what is important to each of us and what we pay attention to. There is no one right way. There is only a way that works best for you. I believe that we need to respect these differences and individualize learning rather than the factory model of education we currently have where we all learn the same thing at the same time according to our age. (Date of manufacture?)

So take in what I am proposing in this book and use it as information for you to evaluate for yourself. What do you agree with? How do you see things differently? We all have a valid point-of-view and a perspective that others don't have. How can you benefit from my perspective and how does that help you become more capable in your own perspective?

Disclosure: My Own Path

I am an imaginative male and have spent most of my life designing new software for computers. I see future possibilities very clearly and get bored easily with what is. I am the constant inventor of the future. So, naturally, I would be proposing a new way of learning. It makes sense for me. But, why would I want to do that? Here is the back story...

As I was completing High School, I didn't want to go any further with education. I was done. Beyond done. If my High School experience described education, I didn't want it. Why? I didn't see the relevance of what I was learning and how it would help me. It was boring and kept me from what I found interesting - my friends. What can I say? I was a typical teenager who didn't know much about the world outside of my parents' house and school and I was intuitively learning the social skills necessary for the next stage of my life.

Instead of immediately going to college as my parents would have liked, I went to a drafting program at my community college. I wanted to learn how to design houses. The program had me copying other people's drawings of houses they dreamed up. I was immediately bored out of my head, but it was the best move I could have made. I wanted more - because *I* wanted more, not because my parents did. So I shifted to another subject I loved, math, and changed to a liberal arts program at the same community college.

For the first time in my life, I could take the courses I wanted to take. I started seeing connections between my anthropology course and history and psychology and... It was all connected! I was turned on and motivated. For the first time in my life I wanted to learn and the first time I got As on my report card.

This led me to computers and programming. After a bachelors degree in math, I continued into their masters program. I wanted then to be a math teacher. In my second semester, it happened to me again... The professor walked in saying we were going to prove a particular mathematical theorem, I don't remember what it was, and I was overwhelmed with a feeling of, "Who cares? I don't! Why would I want to prove that?" It was a strong emotional response and I dropped out and took a job in a small company, just me and the owner, with me programming a computer for the company. Whew! Back on track - for awhile.

Then came the time that I needed a masters degree in computer science to move further in my career. It was now 15 years later. I went to the University of Southern California and their Computer Science department. I was supposed to study software engineering in order to get a better job programming. Instead I met a really cool professor who asked me what I loved. After digging around a bit, I answered that I was really curious about how human beings think. What is going on in the mind? How do we learn?

The professor didn't know, but had some leads for me. I checked out other professors, took their courses, found books, discussed the books with my mentor and graduated with a degree in computer science where I designed the program myself with my mentor's support. Again I was in heaven. I loved the learning because it meant something to me. I was curious. I was passionate. I never once wondered why I needed to know something. Because I was driving the program and I was the one who wanted to know. My mentor kept me on track with the overall path and the requirements for the university. Between us, I had the best education I could possibly have imagined.

While not immediately practical for a computer job, it propelled me past programming to learning and education. It led me to learn how to be a personal coach, which is focused not so much on coming up with the right answer as it is coming up with the right question. I kept growing and growing and growing...

I have long wanted to write a book about what I have learned and my journey, but a book is something that a person holds and passively reads what the author writes. I didn't want to do that. From my own experience in learning, my best times were when I wasn't passive, listening to the teacher. My best times were when I was driving the direction based on my own desires, my own passion, with the goal of making me more capable and skillful in the world I wanted to make for myself.

So I wanted to create a new kind of "university" - a learning experience that adapts to the way the students each need to learn. One that would help them define for themselves the kind of life they want to create for themselves and guide each student independently toward their own vision.

This is that "university." It is not just a book that you just read. You will find more questions in it for you to answer than "right" answers. You will find links to resources for you to explore and extend into areas you find interesting and mentorship to support you in your exploration. If you engage in this book as I am hoping you will, you will end up creating your own path to help make you more capable and skillful in the world you want to make for yourself.

Ready for your own adventure? Here we go.

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I Don't Care What You Know

"I want to know how fast you can learn what we don't know is coming yet."

– Jeff Young

Untitled

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