

November 16, 2006

Learning: Will My Kids Go To College?

Learning (http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&hs=hww&lr=&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&pwst=1&defl=en&q=define:learning&sa=X&oi=glossary_definition&ct=tit) is ...acquiring knowledge or skill through study, experience or teaching... but also ...an increase in the **capability for effective action**...This definition emphasizes the importance of taking actions and achieving results vs. intellectual knowledge without application.

Are my kids going to go to college? My answer is a smooth and unhesitant: NO, they will not.

"Education – the means by which young people learn the skills necessary to succeed in their place and time – is diverging from schooling.

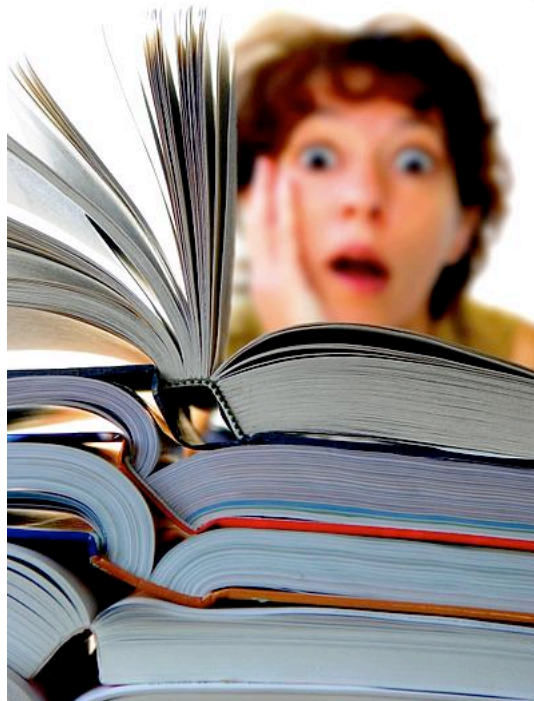


Photo credit: [Galina Barskaya \(http://www.stockxpert.com/browse.phtml?f=profile&l=barsik\)](http://www.stockxpert.com/browse.phtml?f=profile&l=barsik)

Media-literacy-wise, education is happening now after school and on weekends and when the teacher isn't looking, in the SMS messages, MySpace pages, blog posts, podcasts, videoblogs that technology-equipped digital natives exchange among themselves. "

Source: [Howard Rheingold \(http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2006/11/14/participatory_media_and_the_pedagogy.htm\)](http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2006/11/14/participatory_media_and_the_pedagogy.htm)

Schools, colleges and universities do not represent anymore the best way to help someone educate oneself and learn how to best utilize her innate skills to maneuver and navigate the requirements of life, whether professional, interpersonal or spiritual.

Yes, if you want to pre-package your kid behaviors, responses, attitudes and founding beliefs on the industrial society paradigms of scarcity, competition, dogmatic, science-fed truths, specialization of work and thinking, then traditional academic institutions may be still your best resources for molding more industrial-complex managers-marketers-consumers to keep the old wheel spinning some more.

But if you are seriously into helping "[human 2.0 \(http://www.smb.com.au/news/next/human-20/2005/10/24/1130006035858.html\)](http://www.smb.com.au/news/next/human-20/2005/10/24/1130006035858.html)", the all-human self-actualizing techno-animal we so rarely see around us become a reality, it may be worth taking back responsibility and control of the opportunities that out-of-school, non-degree-dependant education can indeed provide.

In a very inspiring letter to his young kids (both of which are bloggers), edu-blogger and educational technologist Will Richardson lays openly the reasons and motivations that lead him not to force his kids to go to college.

The sentiments expressed and the ideas contained in this very short and simple letter to his kids, reflect in great part my own sentiments of aversion for what traditional, classroom-caged learning can indeed still offer to today's kids, while emphasizing the richness and value of experiential, contextual and shared-, group-learning, in which passion and like-minded interests are the all-powerful natural aggregators-motivators.

Dedicated in turn to my very own wonderful kids, Ludovico and Chiara, here is Will Richardson letter:

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Dear Kids, You Don't Have to Go to College

Dear Tess and Tucker,

for most of your young lives, you've heard your mom and I occasionally talk about your futures by saying that someday you'll travel off to college and get this thing called a degree that will show everyone that you are an expert in something and that will lead you to getting a good job that will make you happy and make you able to raise a family of your own someday.

At least, that's what your mom and I have in our heads when we talk about it.

But, and I haven't told your mom this yet, I've changed my mind.

I want you to know that you don't have to go to college if you don't want to, and that there are other avenues to achieving that future that may be more instructive, more meaningful, and more relevant than getting a degree.



Tess and Tucker Richardson, both bloggers, are the recipients of this letter from his dad - Will Richardson

Let me put it to you this way (and I'll explain this more as you get older.)

a) **I promise to support you for as long as I can in your quest to learn** after high school, whatever that might look like.

b) **I'll do everything I can to help you find what your passions are** and pursue them in whatever ways you decide will allow you to learn as much as you can about them.

c) **I'll help you put together your own plan** to achieve expertise in that passion, and that plan may include many different activities and environments that look nothing like (and in all likelihood will cost much less than) a traditional college experience.

Some of your plan may include classrooms, some may include training or certification programs. But some may also include learning through online video games, [virtual communities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community), and [informal networks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) that you will build around your interests, all moving you further along toward expertise. (Remind me at some point to tell you what a guy named [George Siemens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) says about this.)

And throughout this process, I will support you in the creation of your [learning portfolio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community), the artifact which when the time comes, you will share to prospective employers or collaborators to begin your life's work. (In all likelihood, in fact, you will probably find these people as a part of this process.)

Instead of the piece of paper on the wall that says you are an expert, you will have an array of products and experiences, reflections and conversations that show your expertise, show what you know, make it transparent. It will be comprised of a body of work and a network of learners that you will continually turn to over time, that will evolve as you evolve, and will capture your most important learning.

I know, I know. Even now you are thinking, "but Dad, wouldn't just going to college be easier?" It might, yes. And depending on what you end up wanting to do, college might still be the best answer.

But it might not.

And I want to remind you that in my own experience, all of the "learning" I did in all of the college classrooms I've spent time in does not come close to the learning that I've done on my own for the simple reason that now I am learning with people who

are just as (if not more) passionate to "know" as I am.

And that is what I want for you, to connect to people and environments where your passions connect, and the expectation is that you learn together, not learn on your own. Where you are free to create your own curriculum, find your own teachers, and create your own assessments as they are relevant. Where you make decisions (and your teachers guide you in those decisions) as to what is relevant to know and what isn't instead of someone deciding that for you. Where at the end of the day, you'll look back and find that the vast majority of your effort has been time well spent, not time wasted.

In many ways, I envy you.

I think about all of the time I spent "learning" about things that had absolutely no relevance to my life's work simply because I was required to do so. Knowledge that became old almost as soon as it was uttered from my professor's mouth.

I think about how much more I could have gotten from those hundreds and hundreds of hours (and dollars) that now feel frittered away because I had no real choice.

I want to make sure you know you have a choice.

So, when the time comes, we'll start talking about what roads you might want to pursue and how you might want to pursue them.

Your mom and I have high expectations, and we'll do everything we can to support the decisions you make.

But ultimately, my hope is that you will learn this on your own, that you will seize the opportunities that this new world of learning and knowledge offers you, and that you will find it as exciting and provocative a place as I have.

Love always, Dad

Update: Less than thirty minutes after I published this article this morning, my good friend Michael Pick, who is also executive news editor, writer and video producer for the Robin Good's Media Network wrote me in a private email:

----- Forwarded message -----
 From: Michael Pick
 Date: Nov 16, 2006 10:11 AM
 Subject: Re: Will My Kids Go To School?
 To: Robin Good

"Dear Robin,

I just wanted to say thank you for today's post, as it really struck a chord with me.

I am just completing a second masters degree now, in that I was so far into it, there was little point in pulling the plug. But for all of my years of formal education I have learnt far more in the few short months we have worked together than any of it put together. That's why I turned down the offer of a PhD that arrived in my inbox at the beginning of the week.

What did I gain from my university experience? A few good friends and a mountain of debt that visibly aged me, and maybe even put me in hospital. I learnt that what was really worth learning was brought to the table by the students, and that seminars were far more engaging than lectures, surely a remnant of another era.

I have just completed courses in emerging environments for learning and teaching online, among others, and found that far more interesting things were being discussed and introduced by the community of practice formed around the course than any of the content provided as stale readings within it.

Sure, educators have cottoned on and are now using wikis, blogs and other Web 2.0isms in their courses, but the big difference is that you have to pay to join in, and to share your knowledge with others. How many people would consider paying thousands of dollars for a one or even two year subscription to an online community?

I have learnt my lesson the hard way, and just wanted to thank you for bringing to my attention the alternatives.

We were brought up to not even think twice about going to university, and I feel like I have now been deprogrammed. It's a shame, because I dropped out when I was seventeen and spent a year learning what I wanted to from life and from public libraries.

These days the web is so much richer than it was then, and the kids today have huge opportunities to create a sustainable online living, and to draw on what each other have to teach, without the need to call themselves teachers, or students.

Besides the raft of skills I have learnt with Robin Good's Media Network (and continue to do so, every day), I have learnt the value of independence, and the fact that it is a very real, and tangible thing. I have become somewhat of a zealot for the cause, and have to agree with

you.

My kids, if I have a say, will not be wasting their time and getting into debt upon debt for a handful of dust.

Thank you!

Michael"

Originally written by Will Richardson as "[Dear Kids, You Don't Have to Go to College](http://weblogg-ed.com/2006/dear-kids-you-dont-have-to-go-to-college/) (<http://weblogg-ed.com/2006/dear-kids-you-dont-have-to-go-to-college/>)" on November 7th 2006.

About the author



Will Richardson is known internationally for his work with educators and students to understand and implement instructional technologies and, more specifically, the tools of the Read/Write Web into their schools, classrooms and communities.

A public school educator for 22 years, Will's own Weblog (Weblogg-ed.com (<http://Weblogg-ed.com>)) is a primary resource for the creation and implementation of Weblog technologies on the K-12 level and is a leading voice for school reform in the context of the fundamental changes these new technologies are bringing to all aspects of life.

His critically acclaimed, best-selling book [Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Tools for Classrooms](http://Weblogg-ed.com) (<http://Weblogg-ed.com>) (March 2006, Corwin Press) is already being used by thousands of teachers to reinvent their practice, and his keynotes, presentations and workshops to audiences around the world communicate a fresh and inspiring vision of what schools can and must become.

He is a founding partner of the Connective Learning Group which is dedicated to assisting educators contextualize and implement Read/Write Web tools into their schools and classrooms. Will lives along the Delaware River in beautiful Western New Jersey with his wife Wendy and his children Tess and Tucker, all of whom are bloggers.

Robin Good - Will Richardson [via George Siemens] -
Reference: [Weblogg-ed](http://weblogg-ed.com/) (<http://weblogg-ed.com/>) [[Read more \(http://weblogg-ed.com/2006/dear-kids-you-dont-have-to-go-to-college/\)](http://weblogg-ed.com/2006/dear-kids-you-dont-have-to-go-to-college/)]

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Seven years ago in Bangkok, during my participation at an international workshop on improving training quality, organized by the World Bank Institute, I hand-wrote the following: "We are light-years away from what I would call effective training or education." Photo credit: Jacob Wackerhausen I had just been out of... [read more](http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2006/07/29/effective_learning_what_i_saw.htm)

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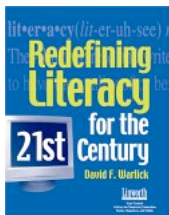
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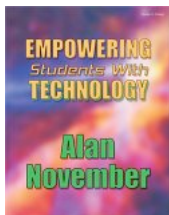
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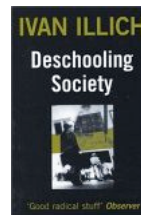
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