



From Inspiration to Aspiration

How Our Spark Creates a
Lifelong Love for Learning

Richard Bruce Smith

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“Education helps us to grow wings of imagination that allow us to feel free and fly.”

– Debasish Mridha, Physician, Author, and Philosopher

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create.”

– Albert Einstein, Theoretical Physicist, Speaker, and Author

WHAT PARENTS WANT MOST

There are multiple research studies that have explored and examined what parents want most for their children. Each study invites us to ask an important question: “What are our hopes and wishes, dreams and desires, aspirations and expectations for our children?” Even before they are born, parents have hopes, dreams, aspirations, and expectations for their children.^{1,2} Shaped by their thoughts and feelings, beliefs and opinions, attitudes and values, parent behaviors influence and affect the development and growth of their children. For example, children, whose parents value knowledge and have high expectations for their education, are more likely to achieve better academic performance.³ What’s more, children are more likely to also have high educational aspirations, be engaged, and, as a result, stay in school longer because they are influenced by their parents.^{4,5}

Overall, global studies report somewhat similar results of parental hopes and wishes regardless of country of origin. Parents want their children to be happy and healthy, first and foremost; they want their children to be safe and feel loved; and parents want their children to be themselves, to be fully self-expressed. Taking each category separately, we can learn more about parents’ hopes and wishes for their children. For instance, when parents say they want

their children to be happy, they want their children to experience happiness and wellbeing, be contented and fulfilled, have a good life and good future complete with marvelous opportunities. According to a survey of over 5000 parents in 16 countries conducted by HSBC, a multinational investment bank and financial holdings company,⁶ “Most parents want a happy life for their children – almost two thirds (64% on average around the world) say that being happy in life is one of the three most important goals they would like their children to achieve as an adult.” In the United States, parents rated happiness even higher; over three quarters (77%) respondents say they want their children to be happy.

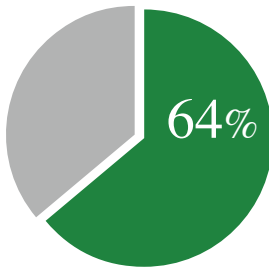
When parents say they want their children to be safe and healthy, they want safety, security, and comfort as well as good physical health for their children. According to the HSBC study, physical health and wellbeing “figure highly in parents’ aspirations for their children.” More than a third (35%) of parents around the world want their children to have and lead a healthy lifestyle. A similar proportion of parents (34%) want their children to enjoy a secure, safe, and comfortable life.⁶ And when parents say they want their children to feel loved, parents desire a loving, caring, and compassionate environment for their family, they desire their children’s friendships and relationships to be

HSBC Study: 2015

PARENT WANTS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

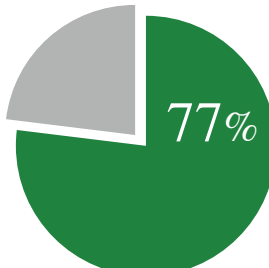
KEY FINDING

"Most parents want a happy life for their children"



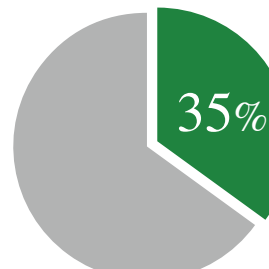
HAPPINESS

64% of respondents from around the world want their children to be happy



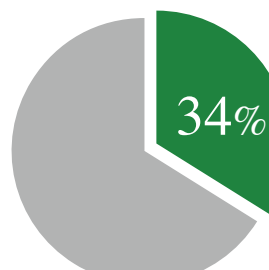
HAPPINESS

77% of respondents in the United States rated their children's happiness higher



HEALTH

35% of respondents from around the world want their children to have and lead a healthy lifestyle



SAFETY

34% of respondents from around the world want their children to enjoy a secure, safe, and comfortable life

loving, and they desire their children to feel and know belongingness. Lastly, when parents say they want their children to be themselves, they not only want their children to be fully self-expressed, but they also want their children to be positive, confident, self-assured, and true to themselves. In addition, parents want their children to be well-behaved conducting themselves appropriately in their work and play in school and at home. There are, as we can appreciate, many research studies, surveys, and approaches to understanding parents' hopes, wishes, and expectations for their children; these consistently affirm their similar perspectives.^{7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12} Whereas most research is focused on parent aspirations for their children's academic success,⁴ there is some research also focused on parenting attitudes toward their children's learning and adopting values in life for their health, happiness, safety, and more.

Pew Research Center, in a survey performed as part of a specially convened American Trends Panel,¹³ asked 3,243 parents on the relative importance of 12 values children should adopt and learn. The results of the survey show overall that parents think the values of responsibility (94%) and hard work (92%) are important ones to teach children and that helping people (84%) and having good manners (84%) are also important. Independence and creativity were also considered worthy. Six other values

Parent Aspirations for Their Children

SOURCE: Various Studies and Surveys*

LEADING GOALS

- [1] Happiness and Wellbeing
- [2] Health and Leading a Healthy Lifestyle
- [3] Safety, Security, and Comfort
- [4] Belongingness and Loving Relationships
- [5] Independence, Self-Expression, and Originality
- [6] Exceptional Education and Training
- [7] Confidence, Optimism, and Self-Assuredness
- [8] Good Behavior and Conduct

* Priorities vary with each study and survey

were audited in the research but having lesser importance on the whole with parents; they are empathy, persistence, tolerance, obedience, religious faith, and curiosity in that descending order.

In another comparative research type of study performed by Best Nanny,¹⁴ 1,956 parents were asked what their greatest wishes were for their children rating only eight values on a scale from most important to least important. Overwhelmingly, happiness was rated the highest value at 48% and health was rated next at 19%, similar in precedence to other surveys; unsurprisingly, children's happiness and health are most important to parents. But what is quite remarkable and noteworthy about this study are the other wishes parents have as values their children should adopt and learn. Honesty was rated next at 12% while responsibility followed at 8%. While responsibility was rated high in the Pew research, honesty was rated higher in this study. Other values, noted in this study that parents say their children should learn, in descending importance, are studiousness and diligence (5%), courtesy and respect (4%), persistence and resilience (3%), and sociability (1%). While hard work was rated high in the Pew research, studiousness and diligence were rated considerably lower in this study. Regrettably, creativity and self-expression are not values that were considered in this comparative research study.

Parent Assessment of Values for Their Children

SOURCE: Various Studies and Surveys*

LEADING VALUES

- [1] Responsibility, Accountability, and Reliability
- [2] Kindness, Compassion, and Contribution
- [3] Studiousness, Diligence, and Resilience
- [4] Courtesy, Politeness, and Respect
- [5] Patience, Acceptance, and Tolerance
- [6] Truth, Honesty, and Integrity
- [7] Imagination, Curiosity, and Creativity
- [8] Family Traditions, Devotion, and Faith

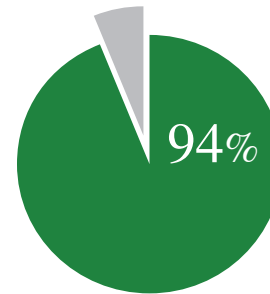
* Priorities vary with each study and survey

Pew Research Center Study: 2014

PARENT ASSESSMENT OF VALUES FOR THEIR CHILDREN

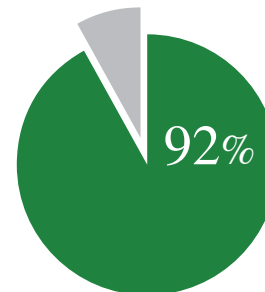
KEY FINDING

"Families May Differ, but They Share Common Values on Parenting"



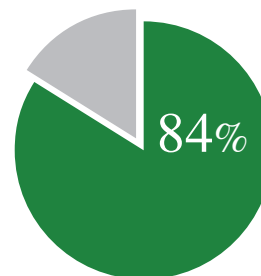
94% of respondents say they value reliability and responsibility for their children

RESPONSIBILITY



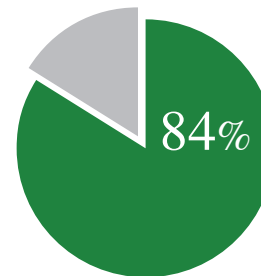
92% of respondents say they value hard work and determination for their children

INDUSTRIOUSNESS



84% of respondents say they value good manners and politeness for their children

POLITENESS



84% of respondents also say they value kindness and compassion for their children

KINDNESS

In another study conducted by Peter L. Benson, psychologist and developmental scientist, of the Search Institute (which promotes positive youth development through schools, youth and family programs, and community coalitions), parents were asked their highest aspirations for their children.¹⁵ Respondents said their hopes, dreams, and expectations were happiness and joy for their children as well as they want them to be connected and engaged, kind and compassionate, generous and charitable, and, above all, parents want their children to “fall in love with life.” Benson calls these aspirations the *language of human thriving*.

AND HOW ARE THE CHILDREN

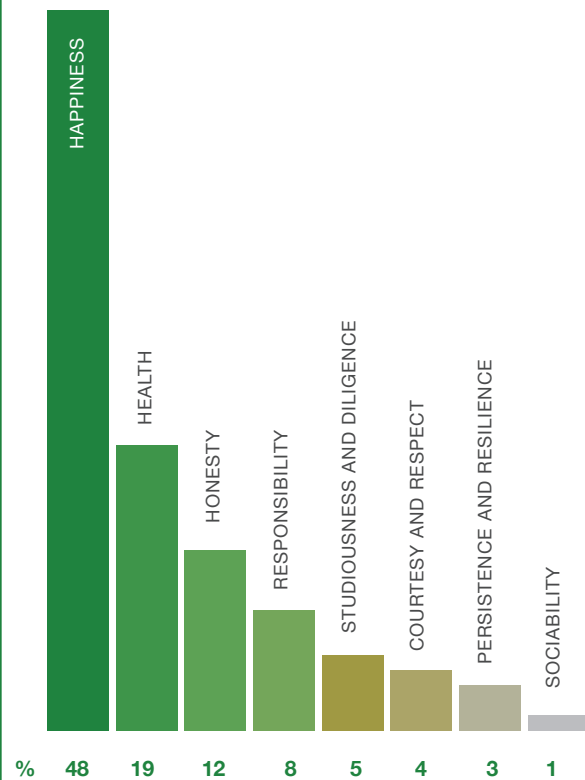
Evidently, around the world, what parents want most for their children is happiness and health. No matter in Asia, Africa, Australia, the Americas, or Europe, happiness and health are considered the most important of all wants parents desire for their children. This is what is valued most universally.

In addition, parents also want their children to be safe and secure; they want their children to know they are loved and cared for; and they want their children to be free to be themselves, to be fully self-expressed. What’s more, parents want their children to have an excellent education for the value it offers in their life and in their development and growth from, so to speak, *the three Rs*: reading, writing, and arithmetic and other subjects including science, history, literature, art, music, and more. What’s more, they want their children to also learn the values and principles valued most by their parents, family, and community for being honest and positive, for being self-confident and studious, and more as well as *the other three Rs*: for being responsible, respectful, and resilient.

From birth to infancy and childhood, from adolescence to adulthood, and throughout the early, formative stages of life, parents work at raising their children based on what they want most for their offspring. Parents around the world successfully raise happy, healthy children using a variety of approaches to be sure although there is no exact formula, process, routine, or right way to raise a child. Time and again, study after study, however, it is the par-

Comparative Research of Parent Wishes for Their Children

SOURCE: Best Nanny



The Language of Human Thriving

SOURCE: Peter L. Benson, PhD* and the Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN

Parent hopes, dreams, and expectations for their children comprise the assets of the Language of Human Thriving

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

- ☐ *Happiness and Joy*
- ☐ *Connection and Engagement*
- ☐ *Kindness and Compassion*
- ☐ *Generosity and Charitableness*
- ☐ *And to “Fall in Love with Life”*

* Psychologist, Developmental Scientist, and Pioneer of the Development Assets Framework

ent's involvement, love, and care in providing the right and good environment, education, and experiences that contribute to their children's development and growth fulfilling their hopes and wishes, dreams and desires, aspirations and expectations.

So, what are the right and good experiences, environments, and education that make this happen? Initially, they are what parents want most for their children, that they thrive. As they develop and grow, children in their full self-expression will also voice what they also think is right and good for themselves; this is usually grounded in who and what influences them (*i.e.*, their parents, family, friends, and mentors) and that which sparks and inspires them.

At this juncture, there is an important distinction to be made based on a traditional greeting of the Maasai, a nomadic or, in some tribes, a semi-nomadic people of about 840,000 living in Eastern Africa near Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania and in mid to southern Kenya. As a curious side note, bearing in mind the Maasai are a monotheistic culture, the word *Maasai* means "my people." The Maasai, placing the highest value on the happiness, health, and wellbeing of their children, in their traditional greeting, is *kasserian ingeri* which means "and how are the children?" while the response is "all the children are well" honoring and acknowledging the sanctity of children and their wellbeing. In other words, all is well in the world if the children are well.

Consider for a moment what can we create in the world, what can we advance in life, if we consistently ask ourselves, our leaders, and our educators, "And, how are the children?" Fulfilling what parents want most for their children while satisfying the needs, wants, and desires of their children (as we too become better versions of ourselves), parents and communities and cultures must work to provide the education, environments, and experiences that are right and good, that nurture children, and create a world in which all is well.

THE ESSENCE OF EDUCATION

Owing to education, we develop and grow individually, professionally, and socially giving us access to understanding our world and, with our knowledge and experiences, giving us access to possibilities and opportunities and, as suggested, to become better versions of ourselves. Education is a systematic process of giving instruction and facilitating learning for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits.

Turning to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), we can acquire a more accurate understanding of the word education and its associated meanings as well as its etymology. Education has its origin in Latin from the verb *educere* which means to lead forth or to bring out; *educere* stems from the prefix *ex* (or *e*) meaning out of and the root *ducere* to lead, guide, or direct. Later, the verb *educare*, also from Latin, has come to mean to rear, bring up, or train and, as

such, to educate. Derived from *educare*, the Latin noun *educatio* means education while *educationem* means a rearing, training, or guidance. The Latin *educationem* provides the basis for the word *education* in Middle French (c.1530) meaning the act of rearing children as well as the act of

training animals. Today, the OED offers a concise definition stating: "Education is the process of giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university." Further definition informs us additionally that education involves the theory and practice of teaching; education is a body of knowledge acquired while being educated; and education is the information about or training in a particular subject. Finally, the OED defines education as an "enlightening experience" whereas the experience of having learned something provides knowledge, understanding, and insight.

Beyond the *Oxford English Dictionary* and other reliable sources, there are, to be sure, many different interpretations and diverse definitions of the word education from educators, administrators, and educational institutions based on their philosophies, beliefs, experiences, values, and methodologies of teaching and testing. Even so, edu-

*From the traditional
greeting of the Maasai,
kasserian ingeri:
"And how are the children?"*

cation is about promoting intellectual and cultural growth and development; facilitating learning of new information, concepts, and skills; and acquiring knowledge and experience for the value it offers students in their careers, relationships, and lives.

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

From an early age, we were told that education is the key to our success in life. We were told to *study hard* and *get good grades*. But what, in the end, is the real purpose of education? Is education the way to a happy and healthy, safe and secure life? Is education the way to feeling loved and being fully self-expressed?

Obviously, education does not have a single purpose; it serves multiple goals.¹⁶ And although some goals of education change with time, many have remained consistent over the years. Perhaps educator, author, and consultant Arthur W. Foshay, said it best, “The one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realization, as possible, of what it is to be a human being.”¹⁷ Foshay continues with other statements of educational purpose including the need to develop the intellect, to create an effective workforce, to contribute to the economy, to prepare students for careers and life, and to promote society, to name a few.

To achieve these goals, educational systems, policy makers, schools, governments, professional associations, and other concerned organizations design, develop, and deliver their versions of scholastic subjects, materials, and plans of study to achieve their academic goals for students. As such, their core curricula are usually comprised of mathematics including arithmetic, algebra, geometry, calculus, and statistics, to name a few; sciences including chemistry, biology, and physics for example; social sciences including history, economics, law, politics, and government; languages and literature, humanities and arts, physical education and sports, and more all to prepare students, in

some manner, for life and career while contributing to their discipline and literacy.

Encompassing the dimensions of human experience, the purpose of education, then, is more than cultivating a skilled workforce by preparing the student for a career to compete in the marketplace and more than preparing the student for citizenship and providing cultural literacy while teaching discipline and values. The purpose of education is much greater; it is also to help the student explore and understand new ideas, think independently and critically, and develop a lifelong love for learning. According to Margaret Ammons, Associate Secretary of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the purpose

of education has changed from “producing a literate society to a learning society.”¹⁸ Summarizing the purpose of education from his perspective, minister, activist, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. suggested, “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.” However, King further suggested, “We must remember that intelligence is not enough. In-

telligence plus character,” says King, “that is the goal of true education.”¹⁹

From a national survey of K-12 parents conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an educational policy think tank, what parents want for their children, in addition to intelligence and character, is a solid education from schools with a core curriculum in language and reading and STEM education, that is science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as schools that focus on the development of excellent written and verbal communication skills and thus a focus on the development of critical thinking skills and good study habits.²⁰ Also from the Fordham survey, according to urban education policy expert, educator, and researcher Dara Zeehandelaar Shaw and education policy expert, educator, and researcher Amber M. Northern, 36% parents said they value schools that “offer voca-

“The one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realization, as possible, of what it is to be a human being.”

tional classes or job-related programs” while 24% parents said they value schools that “emphasize instruction in citizenship, democracy, and leadership.” Some parents (23%) said they value schools with high test scores and other parents (22%) value schools where their students “learn how to work with people from diverse backgrounds.” Surprisingly, only 15% parents said they value schools that “emphasize arts and music instruction.” And finally, 12% parents expressed it was important that schools nurture their students so that they are “accepted at a top-tier college.”

In another study, *What Parents Want from Education: The Case for Real Choices*,²¹ commissioned by the Walton Family Foundation, its results provide additional insight into what parents want for their children. First, according to the study, parents want school choices and school models that are “accessible and distinct” for their children. Parents believe education should “fit the child,” not that the child should fit the education. Second, parents want the same things for their children “regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.” Third, parents care about “academic achievement as a minimal prerequisite” to a quality education. According to the study, educators are focused on what makes a good education whereas parents are fo-

cused on what makes good people. Educators assert an ideal education is one that develops intellectual, emotional, and social skills while 93% parents say there is more to the development and growth of their children, for instance, creativity. The Walton study presents strong evidence that parents want more; they have higher expectations and aspirations for their children than teachers and policy makers understand or acknowledge.

Originally instituted in the industrial revolution for educating multitudes, the current educational system, based on conformity and standardization, is established for the intellectual culture of enlightenment and economic circumstance. Experts concur education has developed a production-line mentality of regulation, systemization, compliance, and conformism. However, considering every person is naturally different and diverse with unique interests, passions, talents, and skills, education should “fit the child” rather than the child fitting into the education. All of this is not to suggest the core curriculum is wrong, but that there are things missing from education that honor and nurture the child. In other words, there are opportunities to enhance the quality of the educational system and opportunities for continuous quality improvement. To that point,

Major Goals of Education

SOURCE: Various Resources, Studies, and Surveys*

FOR THE STUDENT

- [1] *Develop the Intellect and Understand New Ideas*
- [2] *Create Oral and Written Communication Skills*
- [3] *Cultivate Independent, Creative, and Critical Thinking*
- [4] *Foster a Life-Long Love for Learning*
- [5] *Acquire Good Study Habits*
- [6] *Prepare for Continuing Education, Careers, and Life*
- [7] *Teach Discipline and Values*
- [8] *Develop Character*

FOR BUSINESS

- [1] *Create an Effective Workforce*
- [2] *Contribute to the Economy*

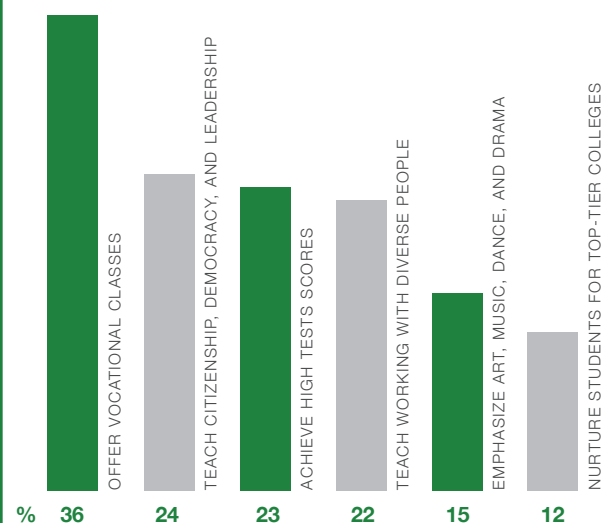
FOR SOCIETY

- [1] *Advance the Society*
- [2] *Promote Cultural Literacy*

* Emphasis on goals vary with teachers, educational systems, policy makers, schools, governments, professional associations, and other involved organizations

Parent Value Schools for Their Children

SOURCE: Thomas B. Fordham Institute Study



according to author, speaker, and international advisor on education, Sir Ken Robinson, “Education is meant to be the process by which we engage people in their fullness to give them a sense of who they are and their capabilities so they can lead a life that means something to them and to the rest of us.”²²

In addition to high expectations and aspirations for their children, parents say the purpose of education is to also fulfill on what they want most for their kids. For example, many parents say the purpose is for their children to learn how to learn, develop confidence and self-esteem, to feel confident about their learning abilities, and apply that confidence in everyday life while other parents say the purpose is also for their children to develop responsibility, diligence, and persistence.²³ Still, some say the purpose of education is for their children to not only develop critical, independent thinking but, more importantly, to develop original, creative thinking too, to be imaginative and fully self-expressed.

Speaking about one of the most important goals of education, Robinson asserts, “It is all about original thinking.”²⁴ With original thinking and the imagination, come creativity. Accordingly, several consultants and educators believe the element of creativity is missing from education; that is, the possibilities and opportunities for students to discover their spark and to develop their own creativity are not available in many of today’s schools and educational systems and are not available in student interests and alternate academic subjects beyond the core curricula. Robinson suggests, “One role of education is to awaken and develop the powers of creativity.” Moreover, he reminds us, “If you can light the spark of curiosity in a child, they will learn without any other assistance.”²⁵

From various studies performed by the Search Institute (with between 6,000 and 7,000 middle school and high

school students), Benson reported a full two-thirds of respondents knew and could name at least one spark in their lives, that one thing when “life feels the richest and fullest,” while other respondents could name two or more sparks in their lives.^{15, 26} From this research, respondents identified more than 220 different sparks that included their purpose and commitments in life; their unique strengths, qualities, and character; and their passions, talents, and skills. Also from speaking with students in this research, Benson says, “All youth want people to know them through the lens of their spark.”²⁷ In other words, students want to be known, acknowledged, and appreciated for their sparks in life, that which inspires them and that which makes them more imaginative and creative.

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION

Speaking about the challenges of teaching, educator, author, and speaker Conrad Hughes affirms, “What a privilege to educate but what a responsibility too.” Hughes also reminds us, “In each child, there is the promise of the powerful, ethical, creative, critical, and engaged adult they will become.”²⁸ The challenges teachers encounter and the choices teachers make influence the way they teach and how they affect humanity in the future according to Hughes. Because teachers nurture the education and experiences, knowledge and skills, outlooks and outcomes in their students, educators need to acknowledge and appreciate the “fresh perspectives of youth,” as they develop and grow. In view of that, not only do we need to appreciate and acknowledge what parents want for their children but also what children want for themselves, the fresh perspectives of their youth.

In addition to honoring the wants and needs of children and their parents, other challenges of education include decreases in funding and budgets resulting in reduced staff, diminished resources, and fewer programs; increases in classroom sizes leading to less personal care, consid-

“Education is meant to be the process by which people engage in their fullness to give them a sense of who they are and their capabilities so that they can lead a life that means something to them and the rest of us.”

eration, and help for each child; increases in standardized testing creating a focus on “teaching to the tests,” assessing teacher performance based on test results, and putting additional pressure on students to conform; to name a few.²⁹ Consider, also, the challenges of student safety and security in school with the risks of violence and the rise in bullying and cyberbullying plus the challenges associated with technology as distractions and invasions on student privacy. And there are the challenges of discipline and compliance, the difficulty of adverse student behaviors and attitudes observed in their lack of interest and concern for learning the curricula and their resulting disrespect for teachers and administrators.

Adverse student behaviors and attitudes often are the result of other difficulties in children’s lives; as such, unfavorable family factors that affect the student and their education.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 19% children and their families live at or below the poverty level which, in turn, adversely affects student learning.³⁰ And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 19% students are obese or overweight which also adversely affects their learning and health resulting in poor academic performance.³¹ In addition, adverse childhood events negatively affect the student and their education.³² Adverse childhood events are distinguished as emotional and (or) physical neglect; emotional, physical, and (or) sexual abuse; and family and household dysfunction including domestic abuse, substance abuse, mental illness, and crime as well as parent separation, divorce, and abandonment.

Obviously, there are many challenges with teaching children and many more unmentioned here that add to the complexity of providing an effective and efficient education. And yet, with challenges there are opportunities for changes, needed changes that seek to improve education and student experiences along with their learning environ-

ments, needed changes evidenced in new ideas, approaches, and trends in education.

TRENDS IN EDUCATION

Many emerging trends in education are exciting and truly innovative; many are inspiring, imaginative, and creative which, in turn, spark the imagination and contribute to the inventiveness and creativity of students. Maker Learning, for example, is one such trend. It is based on the idea that engages and encourages students in interest-problem solving with hands-on activities accomplished in collaborative spaces like an engineering design workshop or fabrication laboratory (Fab Lab). How Maker Learning works is the student identifies a problem, imagines and designs solutions, makes and tests prototypes, and, as necessary, refines them to create one or perhaps several solutions to the problem.

*“What a privilege
to educate but
what a responsibility too.”*

•

*“In each child
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According to Ed Moriarty, instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Edgerton Center, the key take away with Maker Learning is that students are engaged “actively in something they care about.” Moriarty points out that there is an “emotional side of achievement” filling students with passion and joy as they create answers to problems they are excited about solving.³³ Students are moved, touched, and inspired with Maker Learning because the problems they solve are what they imag-

ine and invent. Advocating learning by making, American inventor and businessman Thomas A. Edison urged students to, “Learn with both your head and hands.”

STEAM Curriculum is another exciting trend in which the arts are added into the familiar STEM curriculum of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to enhance not only the student’s academic performance but also extend and expand their imagination and creativity.³⁴ While Blended Learning is another trend in which students learn partially from teacher instruction and partially from

Some Leading Trends in Education

SOURCE: Various Resources*

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| [1] <i>Maker Learning</i> | [2] <i>STEAM Curriculum</i> |
| [3] <i>Blended Learning</i> | [4] <i>Personalized Learning</i> |
| [5] <i>Experiential Learning</i> | [6] <i>Bite-Sized Learning</i> |
| [7] <i>Social Emotional Learning</i> | [8] <i>Mobile Learning</i> |
| [9] <i>Competency-Based Learning</i> | [10] <i>Robotics</i> |
| [11] <i>Gamification Learning</i> | [12] <i>Virtual Reality</i> |
| [13] <i>Augmented Reality</i> | [10] <i>Artificial Intelligence</i> |
| [11] <i>Soft-Skills Training</i> | [12] <i>Flipped Classrooms</i> |
| [13] <i>Micro-Credentialing</i> | [14] <i>Digital Citizenship</i> |
| [15] <i>Genius Hour</i> | [16] <i>Role-Playing</i> |
| [17] <i>Case Studies and Others</i> | |

* Teachers, schools, educational systems, and others are working with a variety of programs, methods, and techniques

self-directed activities, Personalized Learning is a trend in which the school curriculum is adapted to the student’s unique interests, needs, passions, and skills. Experiential Learning is another trend that allows students to develop knowledge and skills in settings outside the classroom by working in different, creative environments like Fab Labs.

In addition to Bite-Sized Learning, which is a technique that provides students brief, intensive activities targeting specific academic skills, there is also Social-Emotional Learning whereas teachers focus on emotional and social-emotional development activities for improving students’ academic progress and wellbeing while helping to lessen or minimize any behavioral or attitudinal issues in the classroom. There is Mobile Learning as a trend, to also take into account, in which students learn with versatility and adaptability on portable devices like tablets and phones and then there is Competency-Based Learning which is learning precise knowledge and skills for a specific job. Gamification (the application of game playing to learning activities), robotics (design, construction, and operation of robots), coding (writing computer programs), and digital citizenship (responsible use of technology) are other trends on the rise in education as are micro-credentials

(small qualifications demonstrating student knowledge and skills), moving from letter grades (for a more qualitative measurement of learning with digital grades), and flipped classrooms (students prepare in advance of classes devoted to expanding course content with discussions and projects) to name a few.^{34, 35, 36}

Understandably, there are several emerging trends in early childhood education, in technology using artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality (to name a few advanced teaching tools), soft-skills training which are desirable in all professions, facilitating learning rather than teaching, and other trends too numerous to examine in our brief survey. Nevertheless, the intention of reviewing the purposes, challenges, and trends of education is not to assert there are things wrong with education (because there are many things right and good), but to suggest there are perhaps things missing and that, if they were present, they would make a significant and lasting difference for our children; things that would spark kids and give them, to quote Foshay, “as full a realization, as possible, for what it is to be a human being” so they get to live a life they love and love the life they live.

CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION

Experts say the most important trend in education, actually the most important goal of education is one for creating a culture of creativity, engaging students in activities that inspire them, stimulating and sparking their imagination, and nurturing their innate tendency for innovation and invention. Robinson asserts, “Creativity, now, is as important in education as literacy.” He says children have an extraordinary capacity, “We should treat [creativity] with the same status.”³⁷

In speaking about creativity absent from education, Robinson suggests, “We systematically destroy this capacity [for creativity] in our children and ourselves” especially by reducing or removing the arts from school curricula.³⁸ Fine and performing arts address the aesthetic wherein our senses are operating at their peak; we are fully alive when we are especially present in the creative moment, resonating in the experiences of art, literature, music, drama, or dance.

Whereas aesthetics enliven our senses, Robinson reminds us that “anesthetics deaden our senses.”

Spanish painter, printmaker, sculptor, and theatre designer Pablo Picasso suggests we are all born with deep talents and abilities for original, creative, and imaginative thinking. “All children are born artists; the problem,” Picasso insists, “is to remain an artist as we grow up.” Robinson agrees. “We grow out of creativity or, rather,” he says, “we get educated out of it.” Somehow, by the time we become adults, many of us lose our creative capacity; we become anesthetized to our own originality. Why?

Robinson suggests two things: first, we do not emphasize the importance of inspiration, imagination, and creativity in school not to mention in business and elsewhere in life and, second, we fear being wrong. Since it can be an unpleasant emotional experience, we do not like to be wrong (or made out to be wrong) and so we socially “stigmatize mistakes.” Culturally conditioned, we think it is “dangerous and bad to be wrong” not only in school but also in business. Robinson cautions us, however, “If you are not prepared to be wrong [and fail], you will never come up with anything original,” imaginative, and creative.

In answer to a question about how he felt to be wrong and fail multiple times while inventing and perfecting the electric light bulb, Edison offers a wholesome, admirable perspective, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Psychologists suggest that being wrong and failing are not bad things; rather, they give us access to practical, real-world learning experiences and, from our learning experiences, they give us access to creating new possibilities, discovering new opportunities, and inventing new solutions to challenges in life.

Creativity in education is essential. It is central to a creative culture and society and its economy evidenced culturally in fine and performing arts and economically in business with the sales and marketing of goods and services. In his work as an international advisor on education, Robinson maintains, “Creativity, properly conceived, is at the very heart of what it is to be an educated person and at the very heart of what it is to be a civilized community; and, if those things matter to us, then they should be at the heart of how we run our education systems.”

CREATIVITY IN LIFE

The common currency of being human is that all life is created. We create our lives in many, different ways: in our thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgements, attitudes and values; in our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences; and in the choices we make and the actions we take. As such, we create our lives in lessons learned from our experiences and events in life, from our settings, surroundings, and upbringing, and from our training and education.

In creating our life then, one role of education is to awaken and develop our powers of creativity. We achieve this by individualizing teaching and learning; that is, the educational system needs to precisely engage students’ curiosity, creativity, and individuality.²⁵ Individualizing teaching and learning, however, can be a challenge since the nature of the ed-

ucational system is established in uniformity, conformity, and standardization and since every educational system has virtually the same hierarchy of subjects vis-à-vis mathematics, languages, sciences, and humanities with little to no emphasis on art, music, drama, and dance.³⁷ Advocating for more inspiration, imagination, and creativity in our school curricula, Robinson asks, “Why don’t we teach dance like math? Why not? We all have bodies.”

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•

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education as literacy.”*

Because human life flourishes in our individuality, curiosity, and creativity, because life thrives in our diversity of skills, passions, knowledge, and experiences, the educational system should focus more on these three principles rather than on an industrial, production-line approach to teaching.²⁵ First, humans are naturally distinct, different, and diverse. Think about this: of the estimated 60 to 100 billion people who live or have ever lived on planet Earth, no two people are, were, or ever will be the same. In our individuality and uniqueness, every life is singular and inspiring, every life is an extraordinary, unrepeatable, improvised moment in time. There never was nor ever will be an individual with your unique and exclusive abilities and passion waiting to be discovered and awakened.

Second, humans are naturally inquisitive and curious. We need, want, and desire to know and understand our self, others, and our world. It is our nature to nurture our intelligence, to develop our insights and intuition; we instinctively want to learn and know the meanings of thoughts and things. In understanding the meanings of thoughts and things in life, we determine their significance, relevance, and value for our self and others; we determine that which is valuable and beneficial giving each one of us our own purpose, direction, and hope in life.²⁶ From our curiosity and interest, we discover and learn that which is individually and uniquely meaningful, relevant, and valued for our self.

Third, humans are naturally imaginative and creative. Unlike other living beings, we have the ability to bring into mind imaginative, creative things that are not present to our senses.²⁴ In understanding all life is created, Albert Einstein suggested, “Your imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.” In our creative imagination, we can revisit the past and even launch into

the future. Moreover, we can anticipate and to some extent predict, we can speculate and hypothesize, and we can originate and acknowledge various concepts, ideas, and points of view. More importantly, we can create; we can create that which is new, more or less, better or different by putting our imagination to work for the value our invention and innovation offer us; we can create that which fulfills and satisfies our unique needs, wants, and desires in life and we do that in our curiosity, creativity, and individuality.

THE SOURCE OF CREATIVITY

Inherently, we are imaginative and creative. Our imagination and creativity arise out of our inspiration, that spark that arouses and awakens us in the moment. It so hap-

pens, then, that inspiration is not only the stimulus of our imagination and creativity, but it is also the spark of our curiosity and learning. From that which moves, touches, and inspires us in life, we develop our passions, talents, knowledge, and skills; the things that enthuse, excite, engage, encourage, and energize us. Accordingly, inspiration is the substance, the essence, of our individuality and distinctiveness. It defines our interests, concerns, and commitments; it defines who we are and who we are being in our life.

Now, consider for a moment another reality of inspiration: it is the means of initiating and advancing what’s next in our existence, in our moment-to-moment occurring world. In

a word, inspiration is the catalyst that initiates and originates our future. That being so, our future is inspired by our present thoughts and feelings, opinions and judgments, attitudes and values; it is created by our perspectives, perceptions, and preferences for making choices and taking actions. In other words, inspiration creates what’s next; not only is it decisive in who we are being and what we are doing, but it is also decisive in who we are becom-

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•

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•

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ing. As such, we are, to some extent, motivated, encouraged, and inspired by thoughts and things which influence the choices we make and the actions we take; for instance, staying in or getting out of bed when the alarm summons us into the day.

Working together through our passions, talents, knowledge, and skills, creativity is the original product of imagination and invention. While our imagination surfaces from our inspiration, creativity originates in our imagination. Inspiration is this unique concept or idea, exquisite thought or thing, exceptional experience or event that awakens something in us, creates an impression or impulse or some elevated feeling or perception or some exalted sensation transcending our limitations and current concerns. In this manner, inspiration is a quality of being mentally inspired, stimulated, and excited to feel something as well as a quality of being enthused and motivated to do something. As such, inspiration involves being inspired by something as it also involves being motivated to take an action based on the inspiration.³⁹

What makes inspiration inspiring is that nothing in life drives our development and growth like inspiration. Inspiration is the breath of life, the fuel of our imagination and creativity. We see something we never saw before; we hear something that we never heard before; and it takes hold of us. It captures our attention and ignites our interest; it moves, touches, and inspires us giving us new meaning, purpose, and direction for who we are and what we can learn, become, and achieve in life.

THE QUALITIES OF INSPIRATION

In their extensive work studying inspiration, psychologists Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot define three principal qualities of inspiration.³⁹ First, inspiration is evoked naturally; it is stirred up spontaneously in the mind without intention. Psychologist Victor Shamas suggests, however, in his recent studies regarding creative inspiration, that we can also intentionally enhance our receptivity to being inspired, in our openness to the experience, by creating, causing, and living in a space of inspiration.^{40,41} Nevertheless, the experience of inspiration occurs in the moment; it

Three Principal Qualities of Inspiration

SOURCE: Thrash, T.M. and Elliot, A. J. (2003).
Inspiration as a Psychological Construct.⁴

[1] STIMULATION

Inspiration is stirred up naturally and spontaneously in the mind without intention in the moment

[2] TRANSCENDENCE

Inspiration is uplifting and transcendent surpassing our normal mindfulness interests, and concerns

[3] MOTIVATION

Inspiration is engaging, exciting, enthusing, and energizing; it is being inspired by and being inspired to

arises naturally and spontaneously.

Second, inspiration is uplifting and transcendent surpassing our normal mindfulness, interests, and concerns; going beyond the limitations of our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Such transcendence frequently involves moments of freshness and brightness, clearness and awareness for new possibilities and opportunities. We are awakened and aroused. According to Thrash and Elliot, “The heights of human motivation spring from the beauty and goodness that precede us and awaken us to better possibilities.”

Third, inspiration involves motivation in various forms; that is to say, inspiration involves inspiring and being inspired, motivating and being motivated. Besides inspiring others, we are inspired by people, thoughts, and things and we are inspired to take an action whether it is to consider that which inspires us or act on it.

Thrash and Elliot assert that “the core component characteristics of inspiration reflect the combination of two component processes” of *being inspired by* and *being inspired to*.⁴² They suggest that “it is possible to be inspired by without being inspired to” when there are no “obvious implications for action” and, as a result, there is wonderful individual value in our consideration of being inspired by. Ultimately, however, in being inspired to, inspiration

should move, touch, and inspire us to act on that which inspires us to perform, produce, or procure something or to imagine, create, and accomplish something which we are excited, energized, and enthused about doing as some form of contribution to our self and (or) others.

We act on our inspiration by imagining new possibilities in our imagination, by creating original ideas in our creativity, and by putting our ideas into practice.²⁴ Shamas asserts, “There is nothing more contagious than inspiration; inspiration is to imagine and create.” Robinson reminds us that from inspiration, “We have the power of imagination and what flows from it, the power of creativity.” And although imagination and creativity are the engine of innovation, inspiration is the fuel that drives it. Without inspiration, there is no imagination; without imagination, no creativity; and without creativity, there is nothing. Inspiration is at the source of all creation. As our spark in life, it calls us into action for what we can imagine and what we can create that is new; what we can create that is more or less, better or different. George Lois, art director, designer, and author, puts it rather tersely, “Nothing comes from nothing. You must continually feed the inner beast that sparks and inspires.”

Psychologist and author Scott B. Kaufman writes, “In a culture obsessed with measuring talent and ability, we often overlook the important role of inspiration. Inspiration

awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility and transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities.”²⁴³ And according to Benson, inspiration is the “human spark” that is essential to human thriving. Transcending our ordinary experiences and limitations, inspiration not only transforms the way we perceive our abilities, but it also nourishes our passions and enhances our talents and skills. As Benson said, “Life feels

the richest and fullest” when we are inspired.¹⁵

According to Robinson, we are all born with deep talents and abilities; he asserts, “The most distinctive feature of human life is the power of imagination.”²⁴⁴ To that point, psychologist Victor Shamas asks us to consider an intriguing question, “Is there anywhere in the universe of thought where your imagination cannot take you?” Robinson further underscores the power of imagination in that it arises in our inspiration and so, from our inspiration and imagination, creativity flows. We are creative when we are imaginative; and we are imaginative when we are inspired.

FROM INSPIRATION TO ASPIRATION

Inspiration, imagination, and creativity are indispensable to human progress and, as such, education. Essential to advancing, nurturing, and sustaining life, they play a fundamental role in society, business, education, and virtually in all areas of human endeavor. Without inspiration, imagination, and creativity there is nothing new, there is nothing more or less, better or different in life.

In business, for example, creativity is at the core of innovation for creating and providing goods and services of value. In education, creativity is vital to our children’s development and growth. While the role of the teacher is to facilitate learning, the overall role of education is to awaken and

arouse and develop the powers of creativity in children in their learning experiences. According to Robinson, curiosity is the engine of learning, achievement, and creativity.^{25,37} “If you can light the spark of curiosity in a child,” he says, “they will learn without any other assistance.”

Since children and, for that matter, most people “don’t know what they are capable of, no real sense of their talents and abilities,” according to Robinson, inspiration, imagi-

“We often overlook the important role of inspiration.

•

Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitation.

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Inspiration propels us from apathy to possibility; it transforms the way we perceive our own capabilities.”

nation, and creativity are essential to education helping us discover and develop our true potential.⁴⁴

Robinson further asserts that humans are born with immense possibilities.⁴⁵ We are born with the inherent capacity for unlimited creativity through our powers of inspiration and imagination, our instinct and intuition, intellect and insight, arousing possibilities and opportunities for us to grow and develop to our full potential through our educational experiences. In view of that, creativity is indispensable to our development and growth especially that our children know what moves, touches, and inspires them in life; that our children know their inspiration and are

known by their spark.

Being inspired and being inspiring, there is something vital about inspiration especially in fulfilling our children's needs, wants, and desires in life; for being extraordinary and unstoppable, creative and fully self-expressed; for being empowered, satisfied, and happy. Inspiration is the source of our children's imagination and thus the lifeblood of their passions, talents, and skills for all their creativity and achievement. Inspiration matters in education because our children matter. Inspiration gives each child their own hope and meaning in life, purpose and direction, so they can live a life they love and love the life they live.

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