

Education versus teaching

by Sabine Eiche

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If newspapers from across the continent are to be believed, much of the effort and energy meant to be expended on education is channeled into surveys, statistics and strikes. Teachers are rated, students are tested, scores are analysed, and everyone is going on strike. We are obsessed about performance in the classroom. It seems to be the meat and bones of education in most public schools today.

Perhaps it should no longer be called education. After all, it's moving further and further away from the significance of that word. Educate is linked to the verb educe, which derives from the Latin "educere," meaning to lead out or draw forth.

In fact, teaching seems a far more fitting word than education for what now takes place in schools. Teach comes from the Old English "taecan," to show, point out. A teacher does not draw the student forth. A teacher instructs – from the Latin "instruere," to furnish, fit out – by instilling knowledge in the student, by furnishing the student with information.

In Europe in the early 20th century there was much discussion about the concept of education. One of the key figures in the debate was the Irish writer and educator Edmond Holmes, whose works are still considered relevant. In 1911 he published a book about elementary education in which he stated that

there was a tendency to attribute too much importance to “outward and visible results and to neglect what is inward and vital” (does this sound familiar?).

Holmes claimed that the purpose of education “is to foster growth.” He also maintained that the process of growing must be done by the child, that the forces for growing must come from within the child itself. Or, as a British writer of the period, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, expressed it, “The meaning of education is a leading-out, a drawing forth, not an imposition of something on somebody, but the eliciting of what is within him.”

Various approaches to education based on such a vision were developed in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Three of these have gained foothold in North America – Waldorf, Montessori and Reggio Emilia. I was delighted to hear about a preschool in Steveston inspired by the Reggio Emilia method. There, the youngsters are stimulated through creative activities and direct contact with nature to discover the world and themselves.

Some aspects of this kind of enlightened philosophy of education have found fertile ground in Richmond’s public schools. The majority now have gardens so that the children can participate firsthand in nature’s miracles, which hopefully will lead to a greater respect for the environment as well as better eating habits.

In October 2011 *The New York Times* ran an article about a Waldorf school in the Silicon Valley, whose pupils come from families connected with the giants of information technology. Interestingly, the school forbids computers in the classrooms, because “computers inhibit creative thinking, movement, human interaction and attention spans.”

But – computers can rate teachers, test students and analyze scores, all in record time. Computers can also furnish the student with information. And

ultimately, information, statistics and surveys are more important than ideas, creativity and human interaction – aren't they?