LEARNING STEWARDS

The Key Distinctions

view online w/links at: http://www.learningstewards.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/KeyDistinctions.pdf

As we adults struggle with the challenges of our times, we must keep in mind that, in the long run, our most important responsibility is helping our children be ready for the challenges of *their* times. In the comparatively slow moving past, preparing children to be ready for their futures was about teaching them the skills, abilities, subjects and, in some cases, character traits, we assumed they would need. However, faced with the unprecedented uncertainty surrounding the future challenges today's children will face, the most minimally presumptuous, maximally relevant thing we can do for them is to: *steward how well they can learn whatever they need to learn when they get there*. Thus our starting distinction:

"We can no longer assume that what we think children should learn is more important than how well they can learn."

The following are brief summaries of the most essential points of our work. Below each summary are links to the pages on our sites that explain each point in more detail.

#1 – Learning: The Central Dynamic of Being Human: Our organisms are biologically adapted to be adaptive. Our brains wire themselves in adaptive response to the environments they develop in. Human babies learn to become children who learn to become adolescents who learn to become adults. From our earliest memories to our present thoughts, each of us is who we've learned to be. From the earliest beginnings of civilization to the present state of our world, we are, all of us, who we've learned to be.

In contrast, our common conceptions of learning mislead and misguide everything about educating and parenting. We tend to see learning as if it's an 'ancillary mental utility' – as if learning is merely the 'means' through which we acquire knowledge, skills and experiences. For all too many people, including educators, learning is seen as academic - what children (and adults) do in schools and at work - rather than the central dynamic of human life. Our common misconceptions of learning and its role in our lives are, in effect, disabling the learning of our population. References: "Learning" – "I Am Learned" – "We Are Learned" – "The Codes"

#2 – Unhealthy Learning: We are always learning but not all learning is healthy**.** We can learn our way into illnesses, addictions, attitudes, and beliefs that have profoundly unhealthy effects not only to our bodies but also to our learning. We can learn maladaptive cognitive habits that misdirect learning and maladaptive emotional habits that cause us to *want to avoid* learning.

Most of our children are chronically improficient in the skills we consider most critically important to their success in education. According to the latest NAEP reports:

66% of our 4th graders and 66% of our 8th graders are **below** proficiency in **Reading.**
60% of our 4th graders and 65% of our 8th graders are **below** proficiency in **Math.**
73% of our 8th graders and 73% of our 12th graders are **below** proficiency in **Writing.**

The initial stages of a child's struggle with reading, writing, or math reflects the inherent difficulty of the learning challenges involved, how well the child's prior learning has prepared them for those challenges, and how well their teachers conduct their participation (inside-out) into learning their way up into the skill. The later, chronic, stages of a child's struggles with reading, writing, or math reflect all the above but now greatly exacerbated and overshadowed by a) how they have learned to approach the learning challenge and b) how the child has learned to *feel* about the

struggle. The more a child blames themselves for not being good enough at a skill the more they will feel shame about performing that skill. The more chronically a child feels shame about a skill the more they will be emotionally inclined to avoid that shame by avoiding that skill. The more a child wants to avoid a skill the less able that child is at learning that skill.

What NAEP (and our other educational data aggregations) tell us is that a vast number of **our children are experiencing chronic self-blame/shame about not being good enough at learning.** Put another way, education is creating the conditions in which a vast number of our children feel chronically ashamed of their minds and that is having a very unhealthy effect on their learning (and life trajectories). Before we can 'improve educational outcomes' we have to be able to recognize and address the 'unhealthy learning' undermining educational outcomes. Most importantly we have to be able to recognize and address the maladaptive cognitive schema that misdirects learning trajectories and the 'mind-shame' that children can't help but learn (in our system as it is) and that can profoundly disable their learning. References: "Unhealthy Learning" – "Maladaptive Cognitive Schema" – "Mind-Shame"

#3 – Artificial Learning: Humans are 'wired' for 'natural learning' - learning through real-time action-feedback loops happening on the living edge of 'now' (walking and talking for example). Most children struggling in school are struggling with learning challenges that are 'unnatural', challenges that are 'artificially confusing' – challenges involving human inventions and conventions that don't 'work' the way nature (and human nature) do. Learning to read, write, spell, and calculate (and most of what later depends on them) requires a kind of learning that is unnaturally challenging to our organisms. Failing to recognize this, we contextualize these challenges in a way that promotes "mind-shame". References: "What is Reading" – "The Brain's Challenge" – "Children of the Code"

#4 – Mission Flip: Stewarding Learning: The world is changing faster and more complexly than at any time in human history. **Robotic assembly lines have eliminated tens of millions of manual labor jobs. Office computing has eliminated tens of millions of routine office jobs. Computers have become a billion times more powerful (cost v processing power) in the past few decades and it's estimated that they will continue becoming exponentially more powerful in the next few decades. Already, today, machines are competing with humans for 'thought work' jobs like grading college essays, writing news stories, managing entire cities and for 'high skill' jobs like 'diagnosing human illness'.** What human skills will be in demand 15 or 20 years from now when the machines are tens of millions of times more cost-effective at performing what had been exclusively human jobs? Obviously there will be ever fewer opportunities for human beings who can only perform repetitive manual labor, remember factoids, or perform routine intellectual functions. What should children be learning today that will make their future employment opportunities less vulnerable to becoming obsolete as the machines continue to advance?

When it comes to preparing today's children for their futures, our mission as parents and educators must flip from 'teaching them what we think they should know' to 'stewarding how well they can learn when they get there'. References: "The Challenge of Change" – "Stewarding Healthy Learning"

#5 – First Person Learning (there's no substitute)**:** Change begins with you. This is not about acquiring knowledge 'about' learning; it's about you learning about your own (always happening) learning and the learning in those around you. This is about you first-person witnessing the life-altering affects of 'unhealthy learning' and the mind-altering affects of 'mind-shame'. As you learn to see learning differently it will change you and how you interact with everyone around you. As you become more learning oriented you can't help but have a more learning enabling effect on everyone around you. References: "First-Person Learning"