

The Winding Spring Process of Education (January 2, 2007)

Overview

The Winding Spring Process of Education is an adaptation of an ancient Chinese masterpiece called "The Great Learning" (the Ta-hsüeh or Da xue). The goal is to educate children to become civilized, responsible, and competent adults. Civilization empowers us by providing safety, prosperity, and the opportunity for every individual to fulfill his or her potential. A truly liberal education includes study of mathematics, science, and economics, but balances the practical matters with study of history and the arts.

The Winding Spring Process of Education has 16 stages in 2 phases. The first phase has 8 stages describing how a young person becomes educated. It is the learning phase. The 8 stages of the 2nd phase describe the ideal application of education.

The application phase is presented to students during the learning phase of the Winding Spring Process. The application phase is an idealized roadmap showing how an educated person contributes to society. Students often ask, "Why do I need to know this?" The Winding Spring Process of Education has an answer: so you can have the best life possible.

The Winding Spring Process of Education is an integrated system. The learning phase builds a competent, responsible, and reliable citizenry. This building phase is like the winding of a spring; it stores energy that will be released later. The application phase is where that energy is released, for the betterment of all society.

The learning phase:

1. Enlightened leadership
2. Supportive community
3. Nurturing family
4. Self-cultivation
5. The orderly mind
6. Extending knowledge
7. The investigation of things
8. The sincere heart

The application phase:

1. Sincerity
2. The investigation of things
3. Extending knowledge
4. The orderly mind
5. Self-cultivation
6. Nurturing family
7. Orderly society
8. World peace.

Bloom's taxonomy of cognition has levels. The Winding Spring Process describes stages. Like Bloom's, you progress from one stage to the next one, not abandoning the use of the previous level. The Winding Spring Process of Education is a grander scheme of education than Bloom's taxonomy because it also describes a path for the educated adult to continue growing in maturity. Bloom's taxonomy focuses only on academic skills. The Winding Spring Process fits education into society.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs places self-actualization as the highest need. The goal of the first phase in this process of education is to prepare our citizens to live a life of self-actualization, empowered to fulfill their potential. The Winding Spring Process of Education empowers people to succeed at the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The Learning Phase

Here is an explanation of the 1st phase of the process: the learning phase. The Winding Spring Process of Education is unique because it acknowledges the interdependence between a successful society and educational goals. This process of education recognizes the connection between a prosperous community and empowered individuals.

The 1st step in the process is enlightened leadership. Community leaders must value the community and promote its welfare. Community leaders work for the prosperity of the community and help foster positive and cooperative attitudes within the community.

The 2nd step in the process is the supportive community, which values and supports education. There is a certain amount of good will and cooperation a community needs to be successful. Healthy communities recognize the importance of well functioning families and are supportive of children, education, and families. All of these relationships work both ways. A supportive community develops enlightened leaders and successful families recognize the importance of living in a good community.

The 3rd step in the process is nurturing families. A nurturing family recognizes an obligation to rear its children well. There is much disagreement in America regarding what it means to rear children well. Successful communities have many families who have successfully solved the puzzle. Before a child goes to school, the child must develop self control, respect for other people, the ability to follow rules and directions, and some skills the schools expect from a child starting in the school system. There is emotional support and a sense of values that families supply to their children that help them succeed in life and in school. The family needs to support education for the child to fully succeed in school. Good families are the bedrock of successful communities and successful education.

The 4th step in the process is self-cultivation. Education is a growth experience. Self cultivation is the active participation of a person in the growth process we call life. A child needs to strive for self control. In the early stages of life self cultivation is largely

increasing self control, improving attitude, and mastering skills. It is important for a child to expect personal growth and take responsibility for participating in that growth. This prepares a child to succeed in life and education. Education is not an object to be acquired. It has to be experienced. No person can have education injected like a flu shot. Education is like love; it has to be valued, sought, and nurtured.

As in all of life, one can get a little or a lot out of an experience. Enlightened leadership, a supportive community, a nurturing family, and self-cultivation are the bedrock for a successful education. Together, these elements enable a child to maximize the educational experience and promote the growth of a child into a responsible and successful adult.

The 5th step of the learning phase is the orderly mind. An orderly mind is developed by learning reason and applying abstract thinking. Informal reasoning is best taught through the language arts program. The ancient Romans divided their seven liberal arts into two parts. The Trivium consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Instead of focusing exclusively on writing stories, students are also taught to write and analyze persuasive writing. Rhetoric and informal logic are taught to support persuasive writing.

The Quadrivium consisted of arithmetic, geometry, music (harmony as mathematics), and astronomy. Arithmetic is also taught at an early age to begin the foundation for abstract reasoning with numbers. The other parts of the Quadrivium are included in the curriculum at a later time.

In developing the orderly mind, students are encouraged to consider statements or arguments for truthfulness, or likely truthfulness. Children are taught to examine statements about themselves, others, or events. Examples of statements for assignments are, "I can say I have good study habits because....," "The Miami Heat defeated the Dallas Mavericks, but the Mavs are still a better team because....," or "The American space program is a good use of taxpayer money because...." This is an important part of teaching critical thinking.

New skills are used to reinforce old skills. The critical thinking skills developed in the orderly mind phase can be applied to self examination for self-cultivation, or self-improvement.

Developing the orderly mind never ceases. It begins at an early point of childhood development when writing and arithmetic skills are first taught. Number patterns can be used in arithmetic to help the children see and appreciate patterns.

Rhetorical skills, meaning effective or persuasive writing skills, are extended and refined through all the years of education once they are begun. Evidence of critical thinking should be clear and compelling exposition.

Aristotle married the search for truth, philosophy, with rhetoric. Eventually, a scholar in the middle-ages divorced rhetoric from the search for truth and sent rhetoric back to the

domain of the sophists, against whom Plato raged. Rhetoric must be firmly connected with the attempt to determine the truthfulness of persuasive arguments, otherwise efforts to teach critical thinking degenerate into exercises in twisted thinking. The educational goal of the Winding Spring Process is to improve society and the individual. This cannot be done with twisted thinking.

The 6th step in the 1st phase is extending knowledge. This corresponds to traditional education: the acquisition of useful facts and skills. John Dewey campaigned against the vision of education being only rote memorization. Unfortunately, Dewey and his followers have rebelled too much against learning facts and have actually undermined education by withholding facts from children. The Winding Spring Process of Education will restore balance to education by turning back the excesses of Dewey and his followers.

Texas is particularly tarnished by the misapplication of Dewey's theories. I heard an administrator in Plano ISD say, "a teacher is a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage." A mathematics professor at Auburn University told me some professors there did not teach their students, but left them to figure out math on their own. They called this "the Texas method."

Independent learning is important, but it is a mistake to rush too quickly to this point. A knowledge base is an important component in critical thinking. John Dewey's book, "How We Think," accepts the importance of a knowledge base for thinking.

The 7th step is the investigation of things. This corresponds to Dewey's goal of critical thinking. Mathematics, science, and the scientific method are perfect for teaching critical thinking through investigation and experimentation. Equally important is the investigation of history. No matter how well we master science and technology, our society will perish if we do not understand the influence of economic, geographic, and historical forces upon our society.

Science and mathematics are important in the investigation of things because they can demonstrate the search for objective truths. Interpreting history is not entirely objective. Students must learn more than historical facts. Students must practice interpreting history while recognizing the lack of objective truth in interpretation and yet striving sincerely for the best interpretation their understanding can produce. Emphasis is placed on a sincere effort to interpret history. History is used to examine and discuss human nature.

The arts can also be used in the investigation of things. Our human nature is reflected in our art. A society is reflected in the art and philosophy it produces. Our children will be exposed to the best literary, philosophical, musical, theatrical, and visual arts our culture has to offer. The arts, when used to examine what is good and bad in human nature, can provide contrast between the sincere and the insincere in human endeavors.

The 8th and final step in the Winding Spring Process of Education is the sincere heart. A successful society depends on responsible and honest citizens and on competent, unselfish leaders. Competence without sincerity is dangerous for society. You cannot test and grade for sincerity, but you can stress its importance and uphold it as a worthy goal. You cannot teach a person to become sincere, but you can teach a person to recognize insincerity in oneself and in others.

The Application Phase

Throughout the learning phase of the Winding Spring Process of Education, the plan for the application phase is taught. The application phase is an idealized plan. The intention is for all citizens to have the best life possible.

The 1st step is acting based on sincere intentions. Honesty is a big part of this. There is too much cheating now in the high schools and colleges, in part, because the students have not been taught to value honesty and sincerity. We need to teach and believe that actions based on insincerity lead to trouble.

The 2nd step is the investigation of things. Young adults need to explore their world in order to make their way through life. Now they apply what they learned in school about investigating things to explore and test what they experience in life.

The 3rd step is the extension of knowledge. Here the young adult continues a life long quest of self education, but also attempts to create new knowledge. This can take many forms. Some people might try creating original works of art. Some might try synthesizing their own philosophy of life. Some young adults might work to launch a new business and learn for themselves what it takes to be successful as an honest business person. This part of the process is wide open. It is the springboard from youth to maturity. By framing this step as an extension of knowledge, it guards the young adults from being swept away by the passions of life.

The 4th step is refining the orderly mind. These steps are not independent. The extension of knowledge is used to refine the orderly mind, and the refinement of the orderly mind aids in the extension of knowledge. Purposeful, thoughtful, and diligent practice and experimentation lead to greater success — whether in sports, the arts, or in business. Success is more than success in a vocation; it is growth to fulfill our human potential.

The 5th step is self cultivation. This is the effort to become the best person possible, given one's understanding of what is a good person. The adult is aware that personal shortcomings will diminish effectiveness as a parent and spouse. The adult understands marriage is a partnership and parenting is a great responsibility, so the adult prepares to fulfill these responsibilities through sincere self improvement.

The 6th step is the nurturing family. The parents provide the support and guidance their children need. They provide love without being indulgent. They provide discipline

without harshness. They recognize a responsibility to both the children and to society. They know their children should contribute to society and not diminish their community.

The 7th step is the support of an orderly society. Children need orderly, competent schools. Business needs orderly, effective infrastructure. People need safety and prosperity. Adults contribute to an orderly society through hard work, honest trade, courteous behavior, and political participation. From the time young people enter high school, they must understand the benefits of an orderly society and look forward to contributing towards it.

The 8th step is the desire for world peace. There are times war or armed conflict become unavoidable, but the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things in the learning phase of the Winding Spring Process prepare adults for intelligent and reasoned action. It is almost like a nightmare for a country to foolishly blunder into a war and then pursue it incompetently. There are examples in history, such as the Peloponnesian war, that can and should be studied in high school. But knowledge is not enough to safeguard a nation from mistakes. Humility and sincerity are as important as strength and power in safeguarding our nation. And when we are safe and prosperous, we must desire peace and prosperity for all people.

Everyone has heard the expression, "What goes around, comes around." That is another way of saying, "You reap what you sow." Sir Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." This is the sincere heart made manifest: charity and goodwill.

What our children need is preparation for a future beyond our imagination.

What we want for our children is the best life this world has to offer.

The Winding Spring Process of Education can prepare our children for a future beyond our imagination and give them the best life this world has to offer.