

Our Failing Education System

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's Talk

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/our-failing-education-system/>

I have a twenty-one year old son and a nineteen year old son. Neither of them have gone to college or seem to be going to college. One of them dropped out of high school. And that would have been a rather insane choice a generation ago, or almost unthinkable. But now, I mean, I'm totally fine with it, but even my parents, who - they have PhDs; when I was growing up, college came after high school, it was just not an option to step out of that. And so even they totally understand the decision of my sons, and they're a little uneasy about it, but they support it, because the conventional educational system is just so dysfunctional. You can't ignore it or deny it now - the enormous amounts of debt that you have to go into to get a degree that is increasingly worthless, the bureaucratic hoops you have to trot through, the tests, the examinations, the requirements, the huge classes taught by professors who can't possibly give you any personal attention even if they wanted to. I mean, the whole enterprise is on life support.

So a lot of really bright young people that I run into....it used to be that the really bright ones went to Harvard. Now, the really bright ones drop out. And they look outside of the curriculum of life, the curriculum that's been offered to them, for other ways to learn. So yeah, some of them piece together an education on the internet. And you can get some things that way, but learning is much more than the acquisition of information. It requires doing, which is why apprenticeship is such a powerful way to learn. Trial and error - you know, like getting your first video camera and trying to make films and learning the editing and making all these mistakes - that is a way to learn, and you can learn something that way, but it's much faster to learn in a community. And the community ideally would have masters and other apprentices.

So how to piece that back together again from the wreckage of the institutions of mass education that we have today is, again, not a trivial enterprise. But yeah, it is a piecing together from the splinters of the system as it disintegrates, which still has maybe a long way to go. But even - well, not everybody, there are still people who really believe in it, who believe that the best way to develop your mind and your life is to get a good education, and that a good education is well-represented by the institutions of higher education that we recognize in our society. There are still people who believe that. But it is a belief that is hollowing out. So many people who go into that system, they're not going into it because they really believe they're going to get a fine education. They go into it because they think they're going to get a good job when they come out, or because they feel like there's no choice, there's no alternative.

And in a way they're right. If you don't go to college, and instead you go to a PDC, permaculture design course - are you going to get a well-paying job in permaculture? I mean, you probably won't get a well-paying job with your marketing degree from Penn State either. But you're even less likely to get a professionally compensated job doing hugelkultur on someone's organic farm.

So if you want to make your way in the conventional world, which is shriveling but still dominant, then yeah, you're probably going to need to get a conventional education. If that world does not interest you very much, then a conventional education is going to seem unfit, repellant. You can try to push yourself through it. You're going to be fighting yourself the whole time. And there are not well-established alternatives. There are some alternatives. Some of the have accreditation, but the really radical, innovative ones do not have accreditation. You have to piece them together yourself. And it's just something that's forming right now. I envision this kind of distributed, maybe four-year program where you go to this eco-institute and that permaculture center and this nonviolent direct training thing and this meditation center, etcetera etcetera etcetera, and this natural building thing, and these things kind of coalesce into a four-year education in the technologies of the story of interbeing.

It doesn't quite exist yet, but maybe by raising the possibility, it will come to us.