

Gen Trends

September 2005

Catching the Wave of the Generations to Come!

The Demise of Reflection

Like many people, there are times when I feel like I live in a pressure-cooker: too many decisions, not enough time. Am I managing my actions according to urgency or importance? Am I making choices based on wisdom or reaction?

Every once in a while I reflect on reflection. Granted, I generally prefer my solitude to the non-stop pace that seems so enveloping today. But I also wonder what impact it's having on the emerging generations.

Many parents seem intent on packing their kids' days with non-stop activity. "Karate before school, piano at 3:30 and soccer at 5:00. We can grab dinner on the way to church group at 7:00. Oh, and don't forget to do your homework." Are we creating a society of young minimalists?

I recently discovered a Mom who has her kids developing to-do lists at ages eight and four. At first, I worried that my kids are not accomplishing as much as her kids. But then again, I may place more value on imagination.

Teachers complain of students' lack of creativity in the assignments they submit. Yes, even a 12-year-old can produce a dazzling PowerPoint presentation on the Civil Rights movement. But does that prove she's really reflected on the impact of this era or simply cut and pasted video clips and fancy graphics?

The wisdom-filled leaders I know deliberately take time to think, contemplate, imagine, reflect, and generally let their minds wander. There is a world where making decisions is a product of reading, discussing, debating, and listening--not doing.

What will happen to critical thinking if we don't take time for reflection?

You Never Can Tell

I am a 36-year-old college professor. About 3 years ago I had a young man in class whom I might describe as a bit freaky; you know, colored Mohawk, a face full of metal, interesting apparel, and quiet. His appearance and his standard of work were the only things on which I could evaluate him. I try not to let appearances guide my impressions, but these were quite powerful. While quiet, he was a decent student. He finished the class with a B.

Several days later, a young man walked into my office wearing a coat and tie. I did not recall seeing him prior to that day. He said, "I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your class this semester." I said, "Do I know you?" He said, "You don't know me, do you?" I said, "You'll have to help me out on this one." He told me his name, and low and behold it was the same rather odd-looking young man who quietly sat through my class.

I politely thanked him for the nice compliment and told him it was my pleasure. I asked him as he was leaving, "If you don't mind me asking, what happened to YOU between the end of the semester and now?" He said, "Oh, my hair and piercings. I just graduated. You really don't think I could get a job looking that way do you? I have an interview in a half hour."

I sat there smiling in stunned silence. He said, "Thanks again, Doc. Take care." In some strange way I think I enjoyed how that played out. I'm not sure why, but I don't look at the younger folks quite the same anymore.

Dr. Donald Melrose

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Pong is Back!

Last year the Atari Corporation rolled out its *Flashback Classic Game Console* loaded with 20 game sensations of the 1980s. This year it is releasing *Flashback 2* containing such hits as *Pong*, *Asteroids* and *Centipede*.

The company has shipped half a million units of the original *Flashback*, which retails for \$30. It expects to ship a million units of *Flashback 2*. A number of these games have also been released on the Internet. In addition, a number of cell-phone carriers have adopted *Pac Man* and other old standbys as part of their standard game sets.

USA Today

“I was playing cards on my bunk by myself when I suddenly felt a presence looming over my shoulder. It was a young private.

“Excuse me,” the private finally said, as he tried to follow the game. “What are you playing?”

“Solitaire,” I replied.

“Oh,” he said, as he walked away. “I didn’t know you could play that without a computer.”

Robert Owen as told to *Reader’s Digest*

Cell Phones

The New Path to Reading?

HarperCollins and Random House, among other publishers are now using text messaging to reach the teen girl audience. HarperCollins is testing a mobile club with Meg Cabot to promote her latest book, *Ready or Not*. Teens who sign up at megcabot.com receive recorded cell phone and text messages from the author. Cabot has also been commissioned to write short stories that will be sent to mobile club subscribers.

A key part of the program is its interactivity. Teens register for prizes, participate in polls and can message friends.

Random House has been using this same technology to promote its *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series.

USA Today

To Ponder

For decades, we’ve worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a steadily declining path toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the “masses” want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies want to give the masses what they want. But in fact, the exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more intellectually demanding, not less.

Most of the time, criticism that takes pop culture seriously involves performing some kind of symbolic analysis, decoding the work to demonstrate the way it represents some other aspect of society. You can see this symbolic approach at work in academic cultural studies programs analyzing the ways in which pop forms expressed the struggle of various disenfranchised groups: gays, lesbians, people of color, women, the third world. You can see it at work in the “zeitgeist” criticism featured in media sections of newspapers and newsweeklies, where the critic establishes a symbolic relationship between the work and some spirit of the age: yuppie self-indulgence, say, or post-9/11 anxiety.

To Read

Everything Bad Is Good For You: How Today’s Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter. Steven Johnson. Riverhead Books, New York, 2005. ISBN 1-57322-307-7. Author Johnson poses an interesting argument that, while plausible in some respects, seems to focus more on challenging conventional wisdom than demonstrating what’s replacing it. While acknowledging today’s debate over media content, he maintains that as one might express concern for the degradation of values in today’s shows, their complexity is, at the same time, making us smarter. Even the title itself, while certainly engaging, grossly oversimplifies the phenomenon. Yes, the title sells books. But it also does a disservice to the overall discussion.

At the beginning of the book, author Johnson says his job is to persuade. He makes some interesting points, but I’m not sure I’m persuaded.

Case Study Corner

Technology has taken over many functions. What possible solutions are there to getting older generations comfortable with new technologies?

I think we need to be careful about short-selling older generations on their adaptability to technology. There will always be the resistant minority who struggle more because of closed minds than lack of skill. That said, we must be careful about assuming that older individuals will learn new technology at the rate of people half their age. It is only natural that they will be more deliberate in adapting to these new procedures and less willing to explore alternatives and short-cuts the way that younger folks seem to embrace. After all, they have to un-learn old procedures in addition to learning the new ones.

Over time however, I would suspect that they can produce at the same rate as their younger compatriots, especially if they are working side-by-side with people their own age. It has always been easier to learn from someone who is one step ahead of you than from an expert who has no patience for the mundane.

Our Future Leaders?

The following questions and answers were collected from SAT tests given to 16-year-old students. You have to admit that some are very creative.

Q: Name the four seasons.

A: Salt, pepper, mustard, vinegar.

Q: How is dew formed?

A: The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

Q: What is a planet?

A: A body of earth surrounded by sky.

Q: What are steroids?

A: Things for keeping carpets on the stairs.

Q: How can you delay milk from turning sour?

A: Keep it in the cow.

Source unknown