

School Daze: Fair Shake Newsletter Q4

Happy Fall, Everyone ~

Although learning happens all the time, September has become 'back to school' month. This makes it a great time to reflect on the purpose of education!

Long-time readers here know that I am a strong proponent for learning. Not for the mandated schooling that crushes our natural love for creative and constructive learning, or the 'career track' education which middle-school to academia has morphed into. Each serves a purpose, but neither helps us grow as valued citizens co-constructing a future that works for everyone.

I am an evangelical for life-long learning!

Mandatory schooling is how we've been pushed into taking sides. We have been conditioned for more than 12 years to seek the 'right answer' and to find our 'expert.' We were not taught to ask difficult questions, to say "no," or to try to look at a problem from a unique angle. Schools had the answers that we were supposed to learn. The constant testing, testing, testing demonstrated our ability to perform, and to retain and repeat the answers. In this light, our conditioning becomes clear.

All of this "education" is supposed to make us good workers. The story goes like this: if we get a job with a satisfactory income, we will have the money that we need to meet all of our physical and psychological needs. Money is what we need. In a shallow, made-for-TV kind of way, it feels easy to agree with that basic logic. After all, we don't know where to start to ask the questions about actually creating a satisfying life! One that includes strong physical and mental health, our unique sense of meaning and valued relationships.

Mandated schooling was designed to filter for and create compliant workers. It was designed, intentionally, to make us ill-prepared for the present moment.

This is demonstrated clearly in the sad story of Charlie Kirk.

Prior to September 10th, I had never heard of this person. Within hours of his death, the President was blaming the "radical left" while others were blaming the extreme right. I could go on and on about how people related to the victim, the suspect, law enforcement, the LDS church and more, have been misquoted, manipulated, and broadcast to further obfuscate any approach to the truth. And I don't even have TV.

As this story unfolds, remember: all news is fake. Each story that you read or hear or see has an agenda; each story omits certain information, and the reporters first commitment is to advertisers and sponsors – NOT to the truth. Many more filters are added as the story is told.

Despite the rhetoric trying to convince us that AI 'learns from vast amounts of data,' it actually suppresses and alters information like any other 'news' source. For example, when I searched for information about Luigi Mangione's court appearance today, both Google and Bing stated that there was no hearing scheduled. As you now know, it has made the headlines in international news. This is a story that the government, the medical industry, and the media want to keep quiet. AI is neither 'artificial' nor 'intelligent.' It is a tool that we are told we can turn to for information, while it actually obscures our access to the facts.

Mandatory schooling also excluded lessons about beliefs and emotions. Together, they drive our (mostly spontaneous) behavior. Not understanding ourselves in this way makes us easy targets for public figures of all kinds (elected officials, TV talking heads, podcasters, radio personalities and many more) to manipulate us, often through fear and outrage.

As you watch the Charlie Kirk story...and all other stories...unfold, consider how the media is steering the viewers. Do they talk in an excited tone? Do they blame? Do they use music with their story? You may also want to think about how the viewers react, or which advertisers are controlling the story or the publication/channel.

As children, we could not push back on conditioning; as adults, we now have the power to learn and grow. (In Kenya, however, students are protesting inadequate education!) As we learn to understand how we are being pushed and pulled by the media, we can help others around us learn, too. We can break their grip on our lives!

As we think about this 'back to school' time, let's remember that our future leaders are learning the alphabet in kindergarten. What do we want our leaders to learn? Should education help them to care about all of society? Should it provide the tools to make good decisions? Should it help them understand and grow as people? Should it provide important ideas needed to build active citizens in a thriving democracy?

In our rapidly evolving world, the most important tool in our toolkit is an open mind...ready to learn more, so we can see opportunities and always be ready for change.

I'd love to hear your reflections!

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE FOOD YOU EAT! Nutritious food – and drinking enough water – is vital for optimal mental and physical health. Would you like to learn more about nutrition, gardening and institutional food? Daniel Rosen, a formerly incarcerated person, who co-founded The Coalition for Carceral Nutrition, would like to hear from you! The organization envisions a “carceral food system that intertwines health, sustainability, agency, cultural respect, and job skills training, in federal, state, local, youth, and tribal facilities across the country.” I emailed Daniel and he said he wants you to “reach out any way (you're) able, including messaging services available at their facility like Jpay or the like (info@carceralnutrition.org), and send us an invite to connect with them (we are happy to send them stamps). Or via phone at 202-893-2600.” Also, let family, friends and activists learn more on their website: www.carceralnutrition.org.

“SMART” PHONE? Smart for whom? Internet-connected phones seem to also be fun toys. Like TV, the phones want you to never put them down or turn them off. Remember: everything you do (including your eye movement, your reactions, your locations and so much more) is sent off to companies like Google who both sell your information AND they use the information to constantly improve their ‘understanding’ of you and how to make you act. Most folks choose to believe this is not important. YOU have a choice in which apps you add to yours.

“Surveillance capitalism redefined the internet as a surveillance prison with no bars and no exit. Human data are instantly claimed as corporate property, destroying privacy as we have known it. The companies harness their information capabilities to the service of state power.”

– Shoshana Zuboff

TABLETS: Most of Fair Shake's newsletter subscribers engage with tablets in some way. I'd love to hear what you think. Pro? Con? Undecided? All of the above??

A QUICK MESSAGE ABOUT JOB HUNTING

- Please remember that quite a few employers hire their employees through staffing agencies! (including Dave's Killer Bread near Portland, OR, where 30 – 40% of the staff have been incarcerated)

- If you live in or near a city, utilize the AMERICAN JOB CENTERS – also known as CAREER ONE STOP. Job centers offer training, career counseling, and they connect you to available jobs in the area. You can use their internet-connected computers, too. (For example, you can work on your resume, find local job listings, and search for resources on the Fair Shake website!) They even have specific support for Veterans, folks with disabilities, job-seekers over 55, and formerly incarcerated people. www.careeronestop.org

- Most employers are 'Second Chance Employers' now. Apply for work where you WANT to work! (provided you have the skills, of course ~ :)

RESOURCE INFO TODAY: Sadly, most organizations, even those that serve incarcerated people, no longer offer addresses or respond to letters. I will always look for an address, but if I only offer a link, that's because that is all the organization has made available.

BEYOND RECIDIVISM

Reentry is using new metrics and lingo to try to improve outcomes and programs. They still have a lot of icky terms...such as "desistance"...which means you 'resist' the urge to commit crime. (Do you feel you are addicted to crime?) As we move toward electronic monitoring to reduce prison populations, we can see the ways that the

'reentry powers' are changing their language and practices. I am writing a short article on this now and offer it in the articles section below.

GERRYMANDERING IN A NUTSHELL or Where do YOU call home?

The term "Gerrymander" is derived from the name of Gov. Elbridge Gerry of MA, who enacted a law in 1812 defining new state senatorial districts to give disproportionate representation to one political party. When incarcerated people are used in this scheme, as they often are on the state level, this has the doubly-egregious effect of diluting the voting power of minorities. People who consider cities home (more often Democrats) are counted in the towns or counties where the prison is located (more often Republican). They have no say in this plot since they cannot vote. How can this be possible? The GOP aims to strengthen their control of the entire country by adding more Republican seats to Congress. In retaliation, CA Gov. Gavin Newsome aims to do the same. California, does not allow incarcerated people to be used in this way, but 40 states - including TX, WI, PA, MA, NV, and even 'nice' MN - do. Presently there is no movement that I am aware of to end this practice. I believe a lot of people would support such a movement, but it would have to be led by incarcerated people, since they are the ones being used by the politicians. For more information on this, contact the Prison Policy Initiative, PO Box 127, Northampton, MA 01061

PEER SPECIALISTS –

How about peer specialists that can help us learn to think better? To make good decisions? To question our assumptions, reflect and journal, and share thoughts and ideas? I believe I get this from you when you write to me! I hope I offer it to you, too...and I hope we can expand our circles. The Peer Specialist idea is great, and society needs better thinking skills!

ARTICLES AVAILABLE BY REQUEST:

- Tom Asacker: Three Truths No One Tells You (Another gem from a FS favorite author)
- Daniel Rosen: Healthy Food, Healthy Prisons, Healthy Communities: An Agenda for Action
- Beyond Recidivism – a review of how we measure, and hopefully improve, reentry success

QUOTES:

“I realize I have a road ahead of me...but I like road trips!” - John Longo
(currently incarcerated)

“I am not an optimist, but I am a prisoner of hope.” ~ Cornel West

The best investments are the things no one can take away from you:
knowledge, experience, mindset, attitude. - Mark Manson

“Trust is built in very small moments.” - Brene’ Brown

"There is one thing that evil cannot stand, and that is forgiveness."
- Fred Rodgers

“Why not dare yourself to become a shining positive light where darkness is the
only thing known?” – Edmond Mbiaka

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”
– Anne Frank

To our successful transitions!

Ubuntu! ~ sue

Please let your family and friends know they can search through the entire Fair Shake
website (with more than 12,000 resources!) completely anonymously. They can read the
newsletters here: <https://www.fairshake.net/fair-shake-newsletter>

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