

Why Join?

Premise: Being fully human means being fully engaged.

Read [The Power of Full Engagement](#) by Jim Loehr & Tony Schwartz

& [A Wonderful Life](#) by Frank Martela

Our Paradoxical Situation	
We want to be governed well YET	the majority of citizens are disengaged and a growing number distrust core institutions of society URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/
We want to produce wealth for posterity YET	a majority of the workforce is disengaged, according to global survey data from Gallup URL: https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231668/dismal-employee-engagement-sign-global-mismanagement.aspx
We want an educated citizenry YET	the majority of students and teachers in schools are disengaged, as demonstrated by too many: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Drop-outs ◆ Underachievers ◆ Fauxchievers (who get the rewards of schooling without mastering the lessons taught) ○ Turn-overs ○ Burn Outs (who merely go through the motions) ○ Fauxteachers (who are prevented from being effective by bad policies) See More Joy More Genius by Don Berg, p.3-5

Our Situation:

Pervasive global disengagement is diminishing our humanity and degrading the planet.

How did we get here? Read [The Story of School](#) **starting on the next page.**

- In short, we humans are wired for local tribalism which means we create simple local “enemies” within a complex global system, producing bad results for everyone. In spite of some opinions to the contrary, there are no bad guys nor conspiracies, it’s just us.

Conclusion: We have to catalyze more engagement

We have to take responsibility, because society does not yet know how.

We need to be the catalysts that cause large effects from relatively small actions.

e.g. The proverbial straws that break the camel's back.

Join DLA



Monthly Member Contributions Catalyze Our Efforts To:

1. Build a network of leaders, like you, who are committed to deeper learning advocacy
2. Engage in a series of Deeper Learning Policy Campaigns
3. Build a Non-Profit Platform: EdDb.org (e.g. IMDb meets Wikipedia for schools)

The Story of School: A Call To Mend The Sacred Hoop¹

Did you ever wonder where schools came from and where they are going ever since you got thrown out, dropped out, or graduated? I couldn't stop thinking about that, so I looked it up.

What the textbook said is that only schools for the elite existed until the industrial revolution; then the current schools for the masses were invented. The ideas of age segregation, dividing the day into class periods, ringing bells to change classes, letter grades, report cards, and many other features of most schools today were designed to ensure that children would be well-trained to behave as if they were a cog in the production engine of an industrial factory. The central actors in this type of schooling are, first, teachers who deliver academic content via instruction into the heads of students. And second, administrators who make sure that the teachers and students have the right incentives to produce the instructional bookkeeping, such as test scores and grades, that are supposed to tell everyone how well they are doing.

Well, I looked into it a little more. I've spent over 30 years studying schooling and education. And you know what I found out? That this is not the whole story. For one thing this system looks fine, a nice feedback loop, no problem. But, according to the media, everyone knows it's in crisis. They tell us that the crisis must be caused by bad instruction, bad teachers, bad incentives, bad administrators, bad tests, and/or bad students. They are forced to tell us that because there are no other options in their model. The real crisis is that they've completely missed the problem. This system is in crisis because it expects people to act like data-processing machines and real human beings do not act like machines. We are not robots. Learning is not about delivering content; it is about growing mental maps.

Robots will relentlessly and unquestioningly process instructional data without regard for family and friends because robots don't have them. But we, humans, do have family and friends and we will not ignore them in order to process data. Also, humans who have never been given the opportunity to be creative or make important decisions will not be creative and will not make good decisions. Treating human beings like robots is not OK, but our school system does it every day.

The truth is that you have to give children lots of opportunities to be creative and make important decisions in order for them to map out how to work within a community of humans. Preferably they will participate in a community that provides them with valuable opportunities to meet their needs and pursue their goals. By having those experiences, they will make useful mental maps of what it means to live in a community. When they get older and start making decisions that seriously affect others they will already have good solid working mental maps of the communities they grew up in. They can scale up or adjust those maps to help them work with their new friends and co-workers.

But before I explain the truth in more detail let's review the story of school that is implied in the textbooks and media coverage but that they never reveal outright:

¹ Inspired by *The Story of Stuff with Annie Leonard*, URL: <https://www.storyofstuff.org>

Suddenly a few thousand years ago human civilization popped into existence equipped with sacred books that contained the absolute truth about who we are and how we should be. Of course, it was only logical that since books contained such powerful wisdom, then the ability to create books by manipulating symbols must be the most important skill to have. The key to passing symbol manipulation skills, and therefore our power and wisdom, from one generation to the next is the institution of school.

It was assumed that dutifully accepting guidance from the book caused success and prosperity. Therefore, children must have those skills delivered to them or they will not be able to make a valuable contribution to society. But, access to schools and the skills of the book were restricted to the elite.

Then just a few hundred years ago science came along and proved even more effectively that manipulating symbols is really powerful. The books produced by science were not deemed sacred, but they began to give those who could understand them seemingly miraculous powers. These developments just made it all the more obvious that manipulating symbols must be the most important skill to have. And we, the people of the Book, succeeded like never before although our success brought problems, too. Lots of us were flocking to the industrial cities where more people lived together than ever before.

And chaos reigned; there were disease epidemics, industrial pollution, and more violence than we can even imagine.

Inspired by the very scientific industrial revolution that was causing the problems, we cleverly reorganized our schools like we organized our new factories and we nobly started down the path to making everyone literate. Our developmental scientists, despite disagreeing about everything else, all declared that symbolic mastery was a developmental imperative for children six to twelve years old. We invented efficient management techniques that enabled school administrators to manipulate the incentives that operate in the classroom with scientific accuracy based on the measurement of student outcomes. We redesigned the schools to reflect both our heritage as People of the Book, who deserve their good fortune, but we also borrowed ideas from the scientific management of the factories that were making us a global force.

Thus, we transformed ourselves from the People of the Book into the People of the Book Factory. Since that change, schools have been charged with generously sharing the secret of our success by making children learn how to manipulate symbols. And as we have spread throughout the world, we have enabled more and more humans to live at a level that would have been the envy of the richest people of the distant past. The scientific industrial complex has transformed the world and given us global dominion. But, our success is once again forcing us to face difficult problems. And, as People of the Book Factory, we have faith that our symbol manipulations will guide us to the technological innovations we need to survive and live happily ever after.

Of course, that is not the whole story. There's a lot missing. The truth is, the majority of human existence was completely left out. And, of course, we were not spontaneously generated out of nothing equipped from the beginning with literacy and schools. Literacy and so called 'civilization' were developed from at least 50,000 years of storytelling and even before that the stage on which we humans arrived was set by over three billion years of life's evolution.

The real story of school starts a long time ago. In fact, it starts at a time when you would not have recognized the earth as The Earth. Unlike now, billions of years ago the earth was just a regular Joe planet like all the others. It was pretty wet, but there was hardly any oxygen. The atmosphere had a whole lot more sulphur, which is normal for regular Joe planets.

So, the early earth was doing what most planets do: cooling down from a very hot beginning by dissipating a bunch of that energy into space. But then something happened. In the soup of chemicals that made our planet wet there emerged some molecules that didn't just randomly dissipate energy like all the others, they got organized and dissipated that energy more efficiently than ever before. They each decided to accept the constraints of working together even though it meant that each individual molecule didn't have as much freedom as before. And it was cool.

Those molecules were so cool because they figured out how to respond to changes in the environment as the dissipation process occurred so that they could keep their transformation processes going. Variations in the organization of that process eventually led some of them to accept even more constraints in order to have even more fun by working together. They arranged themselves into a system that could both respond to the environment and could directly replicate themselves so all the cool molecules could keep partying together. These molecules did something that might have been a first in the whole universe, they made the party permanent by creating the first living cells on Earth. The first living cells were a molecular party celebrating the dissipation of energy. That momentous transition was the beginning of learning and it kicked off the first population explosion. Now the thing about great parties is that you eventually have to pay the piper. In this case those first cells were having a great time deep in the oceans. But direct sunlight was too much energy all at once so it could kill them.

And you know how it is, popular spots get crowded. Naturally, life replicated itself right into all the easy places to live. So some cells eventually ended up being forced to live near the surface where the sunlight could kill them. This is where the creative organization of life came in handy. Some of those cells living in danger near the surface decided to turn this problem into an opportunity.

They invented photosynthesis by focusing their ability to channel energy on some of the water molecules around them. They channeled that potentially deadly solar radiation into breaking apart an H₂O molecule. They used the two hydrogen atoms to dissipate energy even more efficiently, thus saving their lives, and exhaled the toxic oxygen. Since they were living in the ocean it just bubbled right out of their home and into the atmosphere.

Photosynthesis kicked off an even greater explosion of population and changed the entire planet in the process. So, once again, life got back into party mode. Remember that oxygen is a pretty uncommon thing to find on a regular Joe planet, so when life went on this multi-billion year binge, replicating itself throughout the early oceans, that oxygen eventually started to accumulate in the atmosphere.

Photosynthetic life, naturally, filled up all the easy places to live and once again the piper called for compensation. There came a time when they had to face the fact that their own waste product was becoming unavoidable. In fact, they created a global environmental crisis!

You know what happened? Creativity saved them again. Some of the organisms faced with imminent death by oxygen poisoning found a way to transform the toxin into a nutrient. They figured out how to breathe the oxygen. And once that happened the party kicked into overdrive. Oxygen breathers were such successful energy transformation processes that they diversified to encompass every area of the planet both in the oceans and on land. New forms of cooperative organization emerged, like organisms becoming multicellular. Species were constantly specialized to fit ecological niches. But, if their niche changed too fast and they failed to adapt ... extinction!

The diversity of life exploded and contracted a few times, including the rise and fall of the dinosaurs. And eventually primates emerged, then humans, who are the ultimate ecological generalists. The original humans lived according to their local version of the story of how the gods created them as just one of many life forms within the Sacred Hoop² whose fates were entirely in the hands of the gods.

Every group of humans created a unique story, which they passed on to their children, about living properly in their ecological niche. But they all believed that as long as they acted as Keepers of the Sacred Hoop then all would be well.

The Keepers were so successful that they overcrowded the easiest places to live and, eventually, some people were forced to live in danger where harsh conditions made living extremely difficult. The piper made another comeback. Then one day a tribe figured out that the gods were about to wipe them out and they decided to take their fate into their own hands. These were our ancestors who had the audacity to develop a new story about how we could be powerful like the gods. We broke the Sacred Hoop and swooped down out of those dangerous lands to conquer our neighbors and began subjugating people and lands in the hope that we could take control of Fate.

We, the Breakers of the Sacred Hoop, have been subjugating and controlling so long that we can change the environment itself in response to changes in our human story. We developed writing and began to endlessly repeat exactly the same sacred story as if it were the absolute truth, independent of where it originated. We invented schools to ensure the symbol manipulation skills for creating sacred books would be passed on. The development of the book eventually led us to the development of the factory, which became the final piece that gave us dominion over every ecology on the planet. Our hubris led us to combine them to become the People of the Book Factory and we spread both the Breaker story and the Book Factory Schools across the globe.³

Breaker schools embody the story of how important it is to be in control by managing everything that a child does. Adults in Book Factory Schools notice that children are sometimes reluctant to submit to the boring tasks associated with being MADE to learn symbol manipulation. Since those symbol manipulation skills are an unqualified good for Breakers, it is both logically necessary and morally correct for the adults to control the children so that they will learn the skills for success.

² Hat tip to Shariff Abdullah and his book *Creating A World That Works For All* (1999) for the idea of the Keepers, Breakers, and Menders of the Sacred Hoop.

³ The 2010 feature length documentary film *Schooling The World* makes the case for the incompatibility of mainstream delivery notions of school as practiced by today's colonial powers and indigenous ways of knowing.
URL: <http://schoolingtheworld.org>

With surprising speed and unanimity scientists mistakenly declared symbolic mastery to be the primary developmental imperative for six to twelve year old children. Thus, they conveniently reinforced the very assumptions about the value of schooling that had been designed into schools long before science came along. Breaker schools are exclusively devoted to the symbol manipulation skills of our Breaker ancestors and they utterly neglect the deeper lessons from our Keeper ancestors and from Life itself. Breaker schools act as if they believe in the content delivery theory of education. Regardless of what they say about what they are doing, they are systematically treating children as if they lack value until after teachers deliver valuable academic content into their heads. And they account for the delivery of the content by having the children regurgitate the content on command. The children learn from those behaviors that their value as human beings is contingent upon their scores and/or grades. In Breaker schools children are not regarded as valuable until after they have proven that they did what they were **told** to do.

So now we, Breakers, have been so successful at our own planetary transformation processes that we put ourselves in danger by fouling our nest with our own waste and we are at risk of extinction, like the dinosaurs. We are now, like it or not, agents who are capable of changing the way our world works.

One of our most recent discoveries is that we, humans, live within epistemic horizons.⁴ An epistemic horizon is similar to the event horizon of a black hole. An event horizon is the limit beyond which no light can escape, thus we cannot see in. An epistemic horizon is a limit to our knowledge. It is the point beyond which we cannot see out. We experience everything from within our epistemic horizons. They are a kind of bubble in which we live. We project all the different assumptions we make about reality onto the inner surface of that bubble. Those projections are our user interface for dealing with reality.⁵ Despite our strong intuitions to the contrary, we do not experience reality directly. The resulting images create the illusion that we live directly in reality, not within a bubble embedded in a greater reality. The interior of the bubble is an interface, like the desktop user interface that you use on your computer. Experiences are like the icons on your desktop. You can't read the zeroes and ones that the machine uses. But, when those zeroes and ones are translated into icons and other elements of a graphical user interface, even though the interface hides what's really going on, it is easier for you to figure out what to do to achieve your goals.

The Breaker story convinces us that any of the limits of our knowledge that we discover are just temporary inconveniences and that our mastery of Fate is always just about to become complete. The limits that we discover are not normally taken as evidence that we live in a bubble that hides the true nature of reality, they are taken as evidence that we have not tried hard enough, brilliantly enough, or long enough to overcome them. If we take the history of life and this discovery of epistemic horizons seriously, then we need to recognize that the Keepers of the Sacred Hoop had it partly right; we can be wiped out if we do not recognize our proper place in the world. We will kill ourselves if we do not accept the fact that we live within epistemic horizons. It is time for us to practice epistemic humility and renounce our aspiration to control Fate.

⁴ A hat tip goes to National Review's Kevin D. Williamson for the "epistemic horizon" idea: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/437324/neil-degrasse-tysons-rationality-pipe-dream>

⁵ See Donald Hoffman's book *The Case Against Reality* for the broad outline of this concept and his book *Visual Intelligence* for technical details.

We need to mend the Sacred Hoop and act as co-creators with all the rest of life, the universe, and god because complete control of Fate is impossible. We need to embrace and nurture sacred stories that help us to live sustainably. It is time for us to become Menders of the Sacred Hoop. We need to honor the power of the sacred mystery that can both bless us with health and wealth and use a rogues gallery of mechanisms such as volcanoes, tsunamis, disease, our fellow humans, meteorites, and many others to kill us at any time. Schools need to realize that the most elementary lesson we need to learn from our ancestors is a proper attitude towards the world and our proper place in it as powerful agents of transformation. Delivering units of content is secondary; academic skills are not as important as Breaker culture assumes them to be.

Mender schools act as if they believe in the growing mental maps theory of education and they strive to achieve Catalytic Pedagogy. Regardless of what they say about what they are doing, they treat children as if they are inherently valuable transformation processes who happen to need to figure out how they will contribute to Life. They teach children to continuously expand their epistemic horizons, but with the humility of recognizing they will always have them. They structure their community to support the children in a process of discovering how their unique talents and gifts can create value. They encourage the children to engage with the world and figure out how they can make valued contributions to it. They know that the children will succeed in life as long as they are healthy and hearty. Therefore, they hold each other accountable by assessing the well-being of the children.

They know the children are being well educated because they can observe the growing skillfulness and creativity with which the children navigate self-selected challenges and pursue goals and aspirations that are relevant to both themselves and their community. And when a child's actions may have destroyed value instead of creating it, they carefully help the child realize the consequences of their actions and help them redirect their efforts to more valuable ends. We need to teach our children how to be both the masters of their own attention and wise decision makers who have compassion for all of the life around them that will be impacted by the decisions they make. Then perhaps, we can party on in harmony with the rest of life as we figure out how to live happily ever after!

Fortunately, we don't have to invent Mender schools from scratch. There are schools around the world that put attitude before academics and are on the path to mending the Sacred Hoop, even if they don't call it that. Schools that are on the path to mending the Sacred Hoop are currently few and far between, so it will take some effort to scale them up and help other schools to transform to meet the challenge.

To paraphrase and quote Annie Leonard's concluding remarks in *The Story of Stuff*:⁶

“The good thing about having such a vast challenge is that there are lots of places for intervention.” There are people in schools working on respecting diversity, more equitable use of resources, more participation in decision-making, better access to healthy food, altering schedules to better support the sleep patterns of teens; all of this work and more is really important. “But things are really going to start moving when people see the connections.” When we see the big picture of how all good

⁶ URL: <https://www.storyofstuff.org>



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pedagogies build on the foundation of well-being. When people throughout the system get united, we can reclaim education and transform it into something new.

What we really need to chuck is that old school mindset that learning is just content delivery. There is a new school of thinking on our priorities in education and it's based on growing mental maps, nurturing the children and teachers, creating holistic equity, listening to student voices, achieving Catalytic Pedagogy, more reliable funding, restorative justice, rights-respecting schools, and many more. "It's already happening."

"Some say it's unrealistic, idealistic, that it can't happen. But I say that those who are unrealistic are those that want to continue with the old path. That's dreaming. Remember the old way didn't just happen; it's not like gravity and we just have to live with it. People created it and we're people too, so let's create something new."