

# OPENING MINDS

A Selection of Writing About Education and Schooling.



## Note

Much of what you will find within this thin anthology was published in my blog, Jakartass. I have given the URL of each post to enable readers to access the sources of my quotes.

*Terry Collins* (2017)



## Introduction

Psychologists will tell you that the first three years of one's life are the most important. In terms of bonding with one's mother, of having a healthy diet, learning to walk and talk, one can but agree.

But at the age of five or thereabouts, the expectation is that human babes leave the nest and go to this strange place called school. If we're lucky, there is a mother figure in charge of the reception class for initiates. I was lucky with Mrs. Davies, even though I got pushed off the rocking horse on my first morning and got a bloodied nose

Looking back on those few years I can reflect on learning to play a musical instrument well - the descant recorder. I collected stamps so I knew where countries were on the map. I read about them from books I got from my local public library, where I also came to love adventure stories.

As a member of my local Wolf Cub pack (junior boy scouts) I learned about the importance of social service because we'd take part in Bob-a-Job week. This meant going around our neighbourhoods and doing odd jobs such as mowing someone's lawn or running errands to the shops in return for a 'bob', a shilling in pre-decimal money (and 5p in today's currency).

Inevitably there came a time when life changed drastically: I sat the 11+, the school leaving exam. At that time in post war Britain there were two streams of schools: secondary moderns, where students were prepared for life as workers, and grammar schools where bright students were groomed for tertiary education and an adult life in charge of the workers.

I was one of those bright students, and have regretted it ever since... none of my former classmates were with me. Life became a matter of competition rather than the fostered co-operation of my elementary school years.

At my élitist grammar school with its carrot and stick regime. exam results were important if we were to achieve greatness. The top A stream students were groomed by being appointed school monitors and given free rein to boss we lesser mortals in grade C, my natural level.

The ultimate prize was to have our names on the 'Roll of Honour' because we'd brought reflected glory by going on to a top notch university. My name isn't there, thankfully.

I resented the fact that I was expected to be someone I wasn't and that I hadn't been given the opportunity to discover who I was going to be.

So I became a teacher. Later, I also became a parent.

## Education is Life

*"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."*

- John Dewey (1859 – 1952)

The word 'education' is derived from the Latin word '*educare*' which means 'to bring up'. The methodology decrees the acquisition of knowledge as provided by teachers through a school curriculum as determined by 'authority' (i.e. the government of the day and its bureaucracy). A simplistic term is schooling, which is the regimen used to train circus seals to honk horns and to clap with their flippers.

Another Latin word is '*educere*' which means to 'bring forth', the drawing out and encouragement of individual talents and innate abilities developed both in and outside the classroom.

So how does this relate to Indonesia? Education consultant Mark Heyward succinctly points out that "*Indonesia's education system was designed to provide the nation's huge population with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, religious piety and nationalistic values. It has succeeded well in these goals. But the world has changed and the education system has not changed with it. The system fails to produce an educated population with the skills of critical thinking necessary for a modern, open and democratic society or with the workplace skills necessary for a competitive economy.*"

In 1950, when the first post-Independence Education Act was brought into law, the population's illiteracy rate stood at about 50%. According to UNESCO, in 1970, when this had been brought down to about 21%, Suharto's government introduced the Package A programme, which was divided into 100 modules, of which A1-A10 were basic literacy, and A11-A100 were focused on literacy in the context of life skills. Over the period of the next three decades illiteracy was reduced to approximately 11 per cent in 2000.

However, basic literacy refers to the ability to read simple instructions, whereas the failure is in Functional, or Critical literacy, the ability to form opinions beyond the printed words. Since 1998, the downfall of Suharto and the dawn of the internet, one may have expected that conditions within the state schools system would have improved.

A fellow qualified teacher from the UK writes that "*a school is only as good as its teachers - and its teachers are only as good as their education, professional training and job satisfaction.*"

Well, they, and the current students' parents, were afraid to express contrary thoughts during the Suharto era and this has led to the inability to be responsible or to think of consequences.

I discovered this early in my teaching career here in Jakarta when I asked my advanced English class of business executives how they would have spent \$1,000 if I had given it to them the previous week.

One of them said that he couldn't answer the question.

"Why not?" I asked him.

*"Because you **didn't** give me \$1,000."*

He'd grasped the grammatical structure, but not the concept.

Twenty percent of the government budget is supposedly allocated for education; that is a figure within the country's Constitution, but only recently during SBY's presidency has it been enforced.

The budget is transferred to regional authorities for 'operational expenditure', thus adding further layers of bureaucracy to the process, and expanding the potential for delays and embezzlement. Just this month we read of a primary school's ceilings collapsing on four classes: the school had been waiting renovation for three years....

Teacher training is geared to classroom practices and the need to 'teach to the test', all of which in terms of ranking are multi-choice. There is a government programme to 'certify' teachers, yet that too has been criticised in that materials for the courses are not always available.

Ministers come and go, each one seeking changes to the curriculum. Although the national tests are no longer the factor which determines whether students graduate between the three school levels and into universities, that they are now extended to those schools outside the state system which offer curricula from abroad is yet another indication that the powers that be have no underlying philosophy of educational value.

Everything is a bandaid solution.

A fellow teacher perhaps best expresses my frustration as both a teacher and parent.

*"In spite of all the problems, a visit to a local Jakarta school shows keen and dedicated teachers, who - while painfully aware of their professional limitations - do their level best to provide a good education for their students.*

*"Indonesia's future development and economic success depends so much on the nurturing of an educated workforce, that to not invest in its teachers and make the teaching profession an attractive and adequately-remunerated career is more than a misfortune - it is a crime."*

## **An Examination of Indonesia's Exam System**

Our Kid has passed his 11+. That is, of course, a cause for some celebration as it means that, following his 'graduation' six years ago from kindergarten, he's successfully navigated his second rite of passage into adulthood.

There will now be a three year slog until the next set of multi-choice questions is plonked in front of him. Apart from learning how to choose between A, B, C and D, I'm not certain that he'll have absorbed much essential knowledge from his schooling.

I've always hated mathematics; I may have basic arithmetical skills, such as counting (money), telling the time and measuring area, but I really didn't understand what he was taught (and also didn't really understand) in his final year in primary school.

Last night, over a bottle or two of Bintang (I have problems in counting more than three), three Brits discussed how we were taught to do long division, which is to carry the remainder below for the next step of division with the completed answer being 'built' from left to right at the top. I believe it's named the Fletcher method, but that's immaterial because that isn't the method taught in Indonesian schools.

A friend commented that his daughter did some long division homework but came home in tears because although she got all the answers right, her teacher had marked them wrong because she'd used a method the teacher didn't understand!

What makes this worse is that these same 'standardised' teaching methods and tests are used across the country and are, as argued in the Jakarta post by Benedictus Nugroho, a high school teacher from Yogya, counter-productive.

Although the vision statement articulated in the strategic plans of the Department of National Education maintains that education should be able to equip students with spiritual, emotional and cognitive intelligence; education, in practice, has been reduced to test-oriented school tasks.

This practice, of course, denies the vision statement itself because classroom activities are focused only on the cognitive domain. Future leaders should have not only intellectual capacity but also spiritual and emotional maturity and intelligence.

What makes it worse, says Iwan Gunawan in the Jakarta Post, is that the exam system, being controlled by the government, is not transparent.

In a country where even prosecutors, judges and parliamentarians can be bribed, the national exam sounds like a nationwide early introduction to corrupt the mindset of our children. Before the exam dates, rumors circulated of offers of leaked test papers.

The major problem is that throughout the country, each pupil must pass a set of exams by attaining an average of the scores of all the tests. The standardisation does not allow for individual talents, aspirations or local conditions.

Many students who have been accustomed to an active learning system find it difficult to switch from the independent research skills that they have been taught to the "*beating-multiple-choice-test*" skills that require more time to try 'practice' tests. The psychological costs of this to our younger generation have been very high, varying from apathy to developing an "all-is-fair to win" mindset.

Such is the obsession with 'passing' irrelevant exams that today's students have no more time to play and relax. Their days are overburdened with school assignments and homework.

It's not just in Indonesia though. A Year 6 teacher wrote this comment in the Guardian: "There's something wrong with the amount and quality of testing and assessment we're doing, and the unseen consequences of that testing for the whole school culture.

"It is still a culture where the success of a child, of a teacher, of a school is linked to testing, testing, testing."

That mirrors those being made in Indonesia by her colleagues leads me to think that the forces of 'globalisation' are inherently malevolent.

Children are being trained to consume unthinkingly rather than to realise their potential as participants in the human race. Those who fail are unimportant anyway as they won't have the financial resources to participate except as androids in the machinery of the multinationals.



**Students celebrate passing the national exams**

## Ujian Monyet

*Apasi, apasi?*  
Scratches head, grunts - A-B-C-... D?  
*Ah, ini!*



Yes, it's coming round to that time of year when students in grades 6, 9, and 12 impersonate monkeys as they grapple with the *ujian nasional* (national exams).

As Our Kid nears the end of grade 8, we pay a home tutor to come twice a week to help him with his Maths and Physics. He also attends 'remedial' classes in those subjects at his school. That he shines in the Arts subjects as well as English is of little importance, but he will need to be on track next year if he is to 'graduate' to senior high school.

In 2005, Mateus Yumarnamto wrote a very concise critique following a Supreme Court ruling the previous September which instructed the government to improve the nation's education system and school facilities, as well as conducting an evaluation before holding the national exam

**The Ministry of Education insists that a national examination is still needed for Indonesian education to maintain quality and to set up the national standard for junior and senior high schools.**

The emphasis on standardised national exams, which take no account of regional or cultural differences, let alone the allocation of resources, and which are 'passed' after a programme of rote learning, suggests that Indonesia is involved in the business of schooling, rather than education.

Schooling is the process of inculcation, incessant repetition, a process which produces performing seals in circuses and the troupes of performers with a monkey known here as *topeng monyet*.



Students and monkeys are imprisoned in their allotted roles.

Yet they are expected to respect their teachers / trainers and, by implication, those who trap the teachers within a system which is far from holistic, but is self-serving with its credo of obedience.

I cannot comment on the compulsory Maths, Indonesian and Science exams. However, I can - and must - report that the practice English exam set by the Jakarta City Hall and sat by the city's grade 9 students on 27th January - a matter of 50 reading comprehension and vocabulary questions - contained no less than **60** errors.

Two questions have **no** right answer and another has two. The errors ranged through grammar, particularly tenses, non-capitalised names (and unnecessary capitalisation), punctuation, spelling and collocation.

Collocation is having the right word for the context. For example, meetings are arranged, but appointments are made.

What really bugs me, however, is this closing paragraph from a passage about tropical rainforests which, it is printed, **are also often called the "Earth's lungs" however there is no scientific basis for such a claim as tropical rainforests are known to be essentially oxygen neutral with little or no net oxygen production.**

Ignoring the two punctuation errors, does this passage make any sense? That photosynthesis is the process whereby trees and most other plants absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen is a fact learnt early in life. So, is the writer inferring that that it's ok to cut the forests down?

Before the government sets about improving schools and raising teacher standards, it needs to take a long hard look at the qualifications and agendas of those it entrusts with the education of future generations.



## UM - Yet Again?

Yep, it's that time of year when elementary, junior and senior high school students face the dreaded Ujian Monyet, the multi-choice exams set by regional and national education authorities.

The tests set by the national Department of Education, which in its (lack of) wisdom or vision has emasculated the English language teaching sector, are sat by students throughout the country. Local governments set 'tryout' practice tests, and students in grades 6, 9 and 10 spend an eternity, which several months can seem to be, learning little new or of practical use for their futures.

This is what Iqbal Widastomo said three years ago.

We need to change the mindset of many of our educators to first become critical thinkers themselves before they can develop and encourage critical thinking in the schoolchildren.

Our continuing obsession with discipline and strict order in schools creates a problem for our students and this problem leaves them and us at a disadvantage in the international community. Too often they are being left behind because they have not been taught to think.

They have not been given a chance to think and explore as they naturally should have as children growing up and learning. But they need to be able to think and question and challenge ideas for themselves. Our schools, however, still do not encourage this but instead continue to emphasize memorization rather than actual thinking.

I don't believe we should over-blame the schools. It's just fourteen years since the abdication of Suharto, and changing the mindsets of the powers-that-be takes a generation or two. That the élite in the legislatures and their subservient bureaucracies are the self-perpetuating hangovers is a matter for the electorate to determine - and hopefully as soon as possible. However, teachers and parents of current school students are 'victims' of the Suharto era and, with a few notable exceptions, have yet to change their mindsets.

What annoys me more than anything is that the tests themselves, both locally and nationally derived, are flawed. Or, to put it more bluntly, are riddled with errors.

Last year, Our Kid graduated from grade 9 and is now settled in the senior high school regime. He goes to a school which bills itself as a 'National Plus', a private fee-paying school. These schools need a continued intake in order to survive as a commercial enterprise, and recruits qualified, experienced and caring teachers in order to ensure a 100% pass rate.

Image is everything. (That this year's annual wall calendar highlights various teachers including those who are awarded for their "Punctuality" (sic) is somewhat unfortunate.) However, I still feel a sense of resentment fostered at his graduation ceremony last year.

Our Kid came home after sitting the English exam and told me that he'd two answers (out of fifty) incorrectly. He'd made a note of the questions and the four possible answer choices, and yes, he had got them wrong. But hey, 96% is an excellent result in my book.

At the graduation ceremony a lass was praised and awarded a month's free tuition for getting 100% in the English exam. A couple of months later, the official certificate came through and it turned out that Our Kid had been awarded 98%.

Now, given that certificates are computer-generated, I can only surmise that one of the questions Our Kid had got 'wrong', had been a 'bad' question, i.e. had the wrong answer in the marking key. It follows that the lass who had given the 'right' answer according to the government, had, in fact, got it 'wrong' and therefore did not actually achieve 100%.

**DUE TO MANY SHARP CORALS THE VISITORS ARE  
PROHIBITED  
TO SWIM ALONG THIS AREA**

How many mistakes can you find in the fourteen words?

Consider this question set by Jakarta's (lack of) Education Dept. for the past week's tryout exams for this year's batch of grade 9s.

**Mr. and Mrs. Hermanto**  
Request the company of  
**Mr. and Mrs. Prayudi**  
On the occasion of their 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary  
at 8 p.m. on Sunday May, 29  
Furaya Hotel Pekanbaru – Riau  
Wina( 076126688)

**Q. When will the wedding anniversary be held?**  
..... A. In the afternoon ..... C. In the evening  
..... B. In the morning ..... D. At night.

Apart from the typo, there's nothing wrong with the text, but the question ...?

How can you "hold" an anniversary? The occasion is on a particular day or date, and is therefore of 24 hours duration, so none of the answers are correct. Surely it's a celebratory party, get-together, or soiree that will be held at 8pm.

Then there is the matter of interpretation. 8pm in Indonesian is '*malam*', i.e. night, yet to an Englishman such as myself, it's the evening, the gap between work obligations and bedtime.

## Bureaucrats Fail in Test Making

Some years ago, when the British Council in Jakarta still had an English teaching department, I was asked by the Director of Studies if I was prepared to be locked in a room at the Department of Education in order to proofread the proposed National Exam in bhs. Inggris.

Naturally I agreed.

Word eventually came to me that the project was not to be undertaken because the bureaucrats said that they couldn't afford it.

This is an example of something I would have corrected.

DOKUMEN NEGARA

SANGAT RAHASIA

10



Bahasa Inggris SMP/MTs

Read the text and answer questions 27 to 30.

Picasso was one of the most outstanding and important artists of the 1900's. He was best known for his paintings. Almost every style in modern art was represented in Picasso's works.

Picasso was born in 1881 in Malaga, Spain, as the son of an art teacher. He studied painting with his father and also in Madrid.

From 1895 to 1901, he painted realistic works in a traditional style. Then he entered what was called the Blue period. During this time, he only used shades of blue in his paintings to show poverty in Barcelona.

After 1907, he entered the style of cubism. Among his well-known cubist paintings are "The Three Musicians" and "The man with a guitar" which depicted the destruction of Spanish town. Picasso died in France in 1973.

30. "... which depicted the destruction of Spanish town." (Paragraph 4)  
The underlined word has the same meaning as ....
- A. drawn
  - B. described
  - C. painted
  - D. represented ?

There is NO correct answer!

\*Titles of books, films, paintings etc. should be capitalised.  
I.e. 'The Man With A Guitar'

And the title of the painting representing the bombing of a Spanish town by German planes on April 26th 1937 is ...  
... 'Guernica'.

^The article 'a' is omitted.

## Primary and Secondary Exam Focus

The primary focus of Jakartass has always been on Indonesia, a country I now call home. As a teacher and a paying parent of an Indonesian son at school here, I feel I have the right to be concerned about the competence of the bureaucrats in charge of Indonesia's schools.

Our Kid attends a private school which is ecumenical, not beholden to Islam, Christianity or any other creed. However, it is beholden to the national curriculum and its graduating students have to sit the national exams. So yes, I am raising the issue of the *ujian monyet* again.

I highlighted the English practice test set for Jakarta's grade 9's and sat by Our Kid on January 27th. His class sat another practice test last Tuesday, 23rd February. Thankfully, it had far fewer than the 63 mistakes that the previous one had. This one still has typos and grammatical errors in the reading passages - the tests only offer reading comprehension and vocabulary questions.

There are a couple of ambiguous questions, but what leads me to question the competence of the powers-that-be in City Hall is the following question from a passage about a health supplement.

- Q.44. "Moreover, such combination can alleviate colic of ..."  
What does the underlined word mean?
- a. reduce
  - b. increase
  - c. recover
  - d. suffer

The correct answer is, of course, **a**, but the official marking key states 'c'!

Go figure.

Which nicely leads into a cockup in the practice Geometry test also sat this week.

Q.32 Look at this parallelogram



Besar angle adalah  
(Calculate the angle larger than C)

- a.  $42^\circ$
- b.  $47^\circ$
- c.  $62^\circ$
- d.  $65^\circ$

Bear in mind that in Maths tests students are only allowed to use a 2B pencil. Although scrap paper is supplied for making notes and to do calculations, the use of calculators and protractors is strictly forbidden.

None are needed for the above question.

When I wrote about Multiple Intelligences (since highlighted in a Jakarta Post article about its relevance to business practices) I somewhat cynically suggested that it would not be too difficult to select which one is foremost among bureaucrats.

Now I'm not sure that they have any intelligence. After all, if Mathematics is the most obvious because logical thinking is a key component, how come that particular test was so bad?



1918 naval yard (USA)

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## **Don't feel bad.**

It's not just here in Indonesia that the *ujian monyet* exists.

In the USA and Canada, students entering university can't read and write properly and are often required to take extra curricular courses during the freshman year of university in order to make up.

Also, .the system [in the UK] is unsatisfactory. The student may reach twenty years of age and has only been expected to increase his memory. He is not required to think until attempting a Masters. It seems a bit late in the day unless all we are trying to do is provide accountants, engineers, etc., for the commercial system.

These comments are from an article in the UK Guardian, but are of no comfort because I do feel bad.

As a parent here in Indonesia, I have to help my 13 year old son master test skills, to memorise irrelevant 'facts' decreed by bureaucrats in their offices rather than his teachers at the black or white boards who, like front-line infantry troops, bear the burdens of 'failure' master-minded by armchair generals.

Our Kids best 'scores' come in unquantifiable 'arts' subjects, Art, Music, and languages (inc. Sundanese) which, apart from English and Indonesian, are not part of the national exam. So he isn't going to become an accountant or an engineer.

Most students don't want to, or cannot if they do.

Many graduates here, as in the so-called 'developed world, fail to find work in their chosen disciplines, or are 'forced' to work as unpaid interns for 'trial' periods with no hope of permanent employment.

As I, and countless others, have written, the process of learning how to 'pass' a test is the underlying fault. The tests are made by humans yet are set purely for their ease in marking - by computers. 'Garbage in, garbage out' is an expression not heard much since the early days of personal computing, yet it has never been truer than now.

This trend has its roots in mid-70's at the dawn of the 'free trade/globalisation' era, with the primary aim of turning us all into consumers. Conglomerates are robot tradesmen which aim at ever younger purchasers of their products. There was a time when comfort was more important than style, so why does Our Kid scorn Adidas trainers in favour of Reebok's?\*

Conformity may have a value in societies governed by authoritarian regimes, but Indonesia is suffering the growing pains of an emerging democracy with the freedom to express opinions and has no need of mechanised, roboticised and lobotomised 'norms'.

Now that the internet offers boundless information as 'facts', is it any wonder that, much as it may be criticised, plagiarism plagues universities and schools.

Personal experience is a major key to critical reasoning and forming judgements, yet school children are not expected to take individual responsibility. They are too busy memorising largely irrelevant information with little context in their daily lives or, indeed, their futures.

Current teachers and bureaucrats were students during Suharto's New Order when dissent was actively discouraged. Some teachers do seek to expand and enhance the mandated curricula, but most cannot however much as they may wish to.

So what is the alternative?

Simply put, it is for society to recognise the freedom to be different, to explore and to be creative. After all, we have different aptitudes drawn from our genetic sources and (hopefully) fostered through our home environments.

In 1983, Dr. Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University, developed the theory of multiple intelligences, **a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be adequately assessed by standard psychometric instruments** (i.e. tests).

He originally proposed seven intelligences, later adding 'Naturalist', and more recently a ninth, Existential ('reality smart' - the ability and tendency to pose and ponder questions about life, death, and ultimate realities, generally first manifested among teenagers in their search for identity.)

I've added the possible careers of those folk whose strongest intelligence is as indicated.

- 1 **Linguistic** intelligence ('word smart') - writers, teachers, actors, public speakers)
- 2 **Logical-mathematical** ('number reasoning smart') - scientists, computer programmers, lawyers or accountants)
- 3 **Spatial** ('picture smart') – cartographers, architects, sculptors, builders, graphic artists,)
- 4 **Bodily-Kinesthetic** ('body smart') - athletes, divers, surgeons, dancers, posers)
- 5 **Musical** ('music smart') - composers, singers, songwriters, musicians disc jockeys)
- 6 **Interpersonal** ('people smart') - peacemakers, teachers, therapists, salespeople)
- 7 **Intrapersonal** ('self smart') - philosophers, psychiatrists, religious leaders)
- 8 **Naturalist** ('nature smart') - environmentalists, botanists, farmers, biologists)

We each have all intelligences but no two individuals have them in the same exact configuration - similar to our fingerprints. Hence the need for schools, charged with fostering future generations of useful citizens, to accommodate differences and to enable each student to discover and to reach for his or her potential.

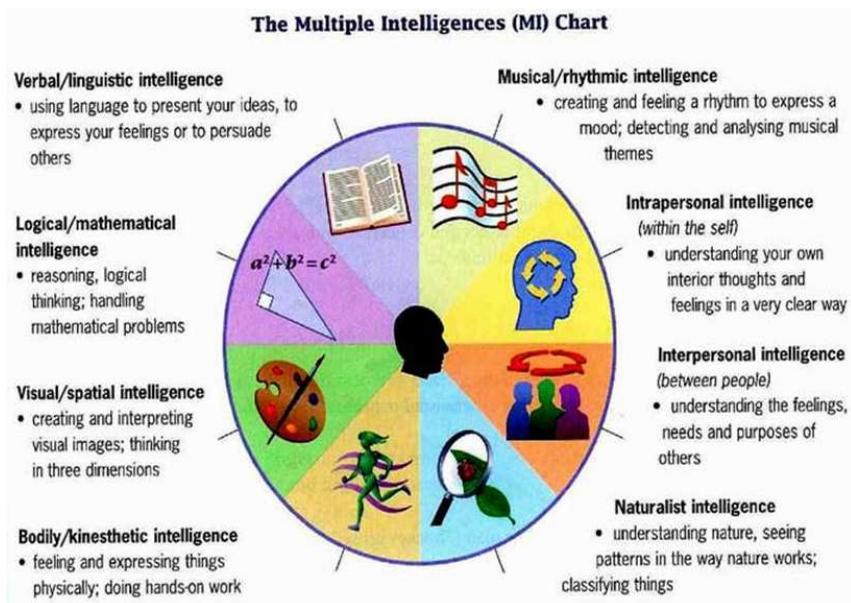
A major overhaul of school curricula is required, rather than piecemeal tinkering. I can therefore only offer faint praise to SBY's newish Minister of Education, Muhammad Nuh, who has talked of introducing an entrepreneurship-based curriculum for the 2010-2011 academic year.

He said that the substance of the entrepreneurship-based curriculum would be included in the curriculum of each level of education. [It] would not overhaul the previous curriculum but an entrepreneurship substance would be included in it.

Basically, [his] curriculum was aimed at instilling entrepreneurship characters to students, including flexibility to think, creativities (sic), innovation and sense of willing to know.

"The first thing that has to be formed with students is flexibility in thinking because this will generate their creativities. One will not be creative if he or she is rigid in thinking."

I'll leave it to you to work out which 'intelligence' is manifested by bureaucrats.



## Surface Attention

A number of schools have taken to labelling themselves as "International", which is strange as they are extremely unlikely to have expatriate students or even come close to what they advertise.

A number of complaints in the media seem to have forced the government to take action. As per usual, they're missing the point and leaving many educators confused.

A 2009 education ministerial, which will come into force on March 30, 2010, stipulates that the curricula applied at international schools must cover the teaching of religion, civics and the Indonesian language. The teaching of these three subjects must be conducted in Indonesian.

There were a number of International Schools in Indonesia during the Suharto era which were established to provide schooling for the children of peripatetic expatriate workers, generally 'consultants' and managerial staff working for multinational companies, such as oil companies. Parallel schools in other countries offered a continuity of education for these children as their parents moved.

Leading up to, and especially following the Asian Economic Meltdown of the late 90s (and known as *krismon*) jobs were expected to be 'Indonesianised' through a "transfer of technology". Naturally, the school rolls tumbled. Because they were expected to be financially self-sufficient, many schools began to accept the children of better off Indonesians who would otherwise be sending their children to study in Singapore.

Mistakes were certainly made. But not all suffered from *krismon*. Such was the amount of such spare cash floating around that a number of private schools which charge high fees for teaching to the test, decided to cream off some of it by opening so-called 'international classes' in their regular schools.

A few white faces, never mind the qualifications - even naval chefs will do - and a few foreign course books, mainly from Singapore, and they had ready made glossy advertising.

But it's all gone wrong. There are few schools which offer - and I'm quoting from a recent job advertisement - *active, student-centered learning and facilitate active exploration, discovery and interaction with people and materials*.

That this ad was placed by a school which is apparently **Leading the Human Development Paradigm** does not necessarily mean anything other than that they are hiding behind buzzwords with little sense of what they mean. Perhaps that's why they have a very high staff turnover.

Every time there is a new Minister of Education we hear tell of a new curriculum, a minor tinkering which suggests that he, never a 'she', has landed a sinecure. New partnerships are formed with companies which rebuild a few rural schools in the name of their corporate social responsibility, i.e. cheap advertising.

An editorial in the Jakarta Post (March 2010) closed with these remarks:

It is the task of all elements in this country to improve the quality of our education, which ranks low even among Asian countries. Therefore, we appreciate the number of corporations that run schools, including those with international standards.

However, it is also unwise for the government to push certain schools, including state ones, to open the international standards of services in the absence of proper educational infrastructure and teaching staff who meet the requirements set for such schools.

It is my contention that to achieve this, an independent commission should be formed which would have the remit to establish curricula for schools which take into account the multi-cultural distinctiveness of the country, and the disparity between the regions in terms of economic resources and physical infrastructure.

The commission should also oversee the establishment of a "proper educational infrastructure" including an overhaul of teacher training so that all teachers (including expatriates) are suitably qualified and furthermore, that they are given regular professional on-the-job back up, as well as subject updates if needed.

The Department of Education, whilst continuing to administrate, would also need 'supervision' to ensure that funds are not 'mislaid' and that targets are met. Above all, procedures and priorities should not be subject to the whim of political (or business) appointees who invariably have short-term goals.

This will all inevitably take longer than a government's term of office, but a dynamic country needs people with vision. Hitherto, education has been subject to a myopic malaise which ill-serves the country and its *rakyat*. (citizens).



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## Known knowns

There are known knowns;

- there are things we know that we know.

There are known unknowns;

- that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know.

But there are also unknown unknowns

- there are things we do not know we don't know.

Donald Rumsfeld, the then United States Secretary of Defense in 2002.

I know the 12 times table and at a pinch I could probably recite the 13 times table quite quickly too. I was drilled at school. I can also tell you that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides, although I only understand its relevance when I retille my bathroom.

Hypotenuse (n.) is an interesting word for some folk: 1570s, from Late Latin *hypotenusa*, from Greek *hypoteinousa* “stretching under” (the right angle), fem. present participle of *hypoteinein*, from hypo- “under” (see sub-) + *teinein* “to stretch” (see *tenein*). Formerly often erroneously *hypothense*.

Thankfully I didn't study Greek at school, but Latin was a pain. I thought I could remember the conjugation of the verb *amo* (to love), but checked anyway, only to discover that the infinitive is *amāre*.

Those two bits of etymology ... now three ... are available in my Webster's New World College Dictionary which sits on my home desk and is way too heavy to carry around. Naturally, I've copied and pasted from the internet rather than copying and formatting verbatim from that tome.

Learning by rote to the nth degree in order to pass exams is a pain!

$$\frac{b\sqrt[n]{\frac{a}{b}} - a}{1 - \sqrt[n]{\frac{a}{b}}}$$

The nth degree – maybe.

However, learning basic techniques and rules of operation etc. in subjects are a necessary basis for enabling answers to one's curiosity. Regarding the use of calculators, I now quote freely from Wikipedia, the open source encyclopedia.

In most countries, students use calculators for schoolwork – but not generally in Indonesia. There was some initial resistance to the idea out of fear that basic arithmetic skills would suffer. There remains disagreement about the importance of the ability to perform calculations “in the head”. I can do simple calculations in my head and give rough estimations, and that's all I need: I'm not an engineer or a scientist.

Research suggests that inadequate guidance in the use of calculating tools can restrict the kind of mathematical thinking that students engage in.

That's possibly true; I've no idea what a lot of buttons on my calculator mean, let alone what they do, or why, but that surely is of very little importance. Maybe it's cos it's no *sin* to not know.

Some curricula restrict calculator use until a certain level of proficiency has been obtained, while others concentrate more on teaching estimation techniques and problem-solving.

Perhaps a balance is needed between the two.

Others have argued that such use can prevent understanding of advanced algebraic concepts.

That's not a problem; I don't even understand most *simple* algebraic concepts,

In a recent debate organised by the British Council and the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), **Professor** Sugata Mitra argued that students be allowed to use the internet to answer exam questions.

Take away the paper and pencil and say this time you have to answer the [exam questions] differently. All you have is [an internet enabled device]. You can email your friends, you can look up on the internet, do whatever you like. And answer the questions.

If you do that the entire system will change. Teachers are intelligent people; they will start immediately to teach differently. They will insist that you don't memorise; you can look it up on StartPage or Ixquick which "were the first search engines to use automatic encryption on all connections to prevent snooping."

Teachers will insist that you do not need to know the 17 times tables because the machine will do it for you. They will insist that you do not need to have good handwriting because you will not hand write at all, you will type. They will insist that you don't need to memorise spellings because the tablet corrects spellings for you, that you do not need good grammar because the machine suggests grammar for you.

What it does not do is tell you how to discriminate. So, [students] will concentrate on how to discriminate between good info and bad info. The present day teacher, the existing teaching system does not do that. Because the examination system is obsolete. Teachers are trained to prepare students for an obsolete examination system. Such teachers are themselves obsolete.

Well not yet, especially in countries such as Indonesia which has only had fifteen years to undo the blinkered control mechanisms of colonialism.

But one can dream of a time, of future generations of students who learn to know what they want to know, even if in so doing they wish to remain unknown.

## Give Kids A Break

Four students have been expelled from a senior high school in Riau for 'defaming' their teacher on Facebook.

The comments were reportedly of a personal nature and offensive to women.

The school's deputy principal, Yose Rizal, said the students' failure to complete and submit homework assignments to the teacher contributed to the decision to dismiss them. Yose said he hoped the decision would send a strong message to other students that such behavior was not acceptable.

That says a lot about what is wrong with the Indonesia's schooling system, especially as the subject that the teacher was supposedly charged with teaching is 'Life Skills'.

Come to think of it, that is what all teachers (and parents) are responsible for inculcating. As a teacher and parent I do know that adults make 'mistakes', but then there is little guidance for us either.

Competition is praised above co-operation so that societal prerogatives are determined by online social networks rather than leadership for the common good.

Public transport is privately owned, as is the water supply, and garbage isn't properly managed disposed of so residents, of all classes, dispose of it willy-nilly.

The current national census cannot be completed as scheduled because rich folks in their enclaves deny access to officials because they have something - their ill-gotten wealth? - to hide.

And kids get blamed for not following the rules!

The results of the remedial tests following the senior high school *ujian monyet* have been announced. Teachers in Yogya are angry because of the "premature announcement", but they are missing the point.

Out of 150,410 students who had to sit the repeat national exams, how come only 11,814 'failed'? How is it possible to master the 'facts' in such a short time since the original exams were sat in March? Are these remedial tests easier? If so, why weren't the March set of tests?

One contributing factor is that the educators and bureaucrats responsible for the whole debacle are apparently lacking any awareness of how teenagers think. For a start, Dr Paul Kelley, author of *Making Minds: What's Wrong With Education?*, says that creating long-term memories is at the core of education.

In 2005, a key discovery was published in *Scientific American* explaining how long-term memories are formed in the brain. Douglas Fields, of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and his team in the US not only revealed exactly how long-term memories are formed but also, more significantly for teachers, how they can be created.

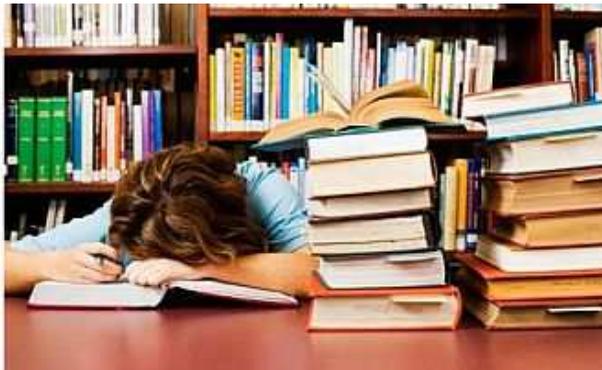
The biological basis of a memory is a pathway of cells linked within the brain. His team looked at how these pathways were formed and how each cell was "switched on" and became linked to other cells.

Surprisingly, constant stimulation of the cell did not make it switch on. Stimulation had to be separated by gaps when the cell was not stimulated. The breakthrough came when the team began to realise the length of stimulation was not vital, but the gap between stimulations

So Dr. Kelly and his teaching staff established 'spaced learning' which works no matter what subject you are teaching. In spaced learning, you have 10-minute breaks between three intensive sessions of 15-20 minutes teaching. In each of the sessions, you repeat material but present it differently, deepening and extending it.

In the breaks, students might juggle, play basketball or model animals out of Play-Doh. Or access their Facebook accounts?

These distracter activities leave the cells to carry out chemical processes.



An Indonesian cup of coffee in which the grounds take time to settle is an apt description of the process of learning: one must allow time for the absorption of new information.

A different approach to the 'chalk and talk' methodology is also required. Rather than lecturing with theoretical 'knowledge', teachers need to offer students more opportunities for experiment and for inductive learning

According to Dr. Iroise Dumontheil of University College, London's Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, says "It's not the fault of teenagers that they can't concentrate and are easily distracted. It's to do with the structure of their brains. Adolescents simply don't have the same mental capacities as an adult because teenagers are still children"

I think that's similar to my problem too; although I think like an adult, I remain young at heart.

First published: <http://jakartass.net/2010/06/give-kids-a-break/>

**Image of the (Mid) Week - 39 (Playtime)**



**Mitra Tabrizian's best photograph: mosque students at breaktime**

Mitra Tabrizian shot this at a Shia mosque in east London where, among other activities, they run weekend classes for young children, teaching religious principles: oneness of God, justice, prophethood, guidance, resurrection.

*"I spent a few days observing what the girls do at breaktime. What was noticeable was that they don't play. They stood around looking lost, as if they don't know what to do. Or they don't know what to do with the rigid education imposed on them at such an early age.*

*The lone figures stood out: perhaps they will one day question and resist the community's uncompromising beliefs and rules, such as requiring young girls to spend their weekends this way."*

.....  
The above image could well have been taken in Indonesia given the controversy which has ensued following comments from the Minister of Education, who has carefully cultivated a public perception that he is an ignorant bigot.

Muhammad Nuh's background is in electrical engineering, with nothing in the humanities, and, it seems, little in the discipline of humanity! He has also served as Chairman of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (ICMI) of East Java. His recent pronouncements have demonstrated that whatever his worth in scientific fields, he is particularly unsuited to be the Indonesian Minister of Education & Culture.

Two and a half years ago I quoted him regarding his proposed introduction of an "entrepreneurship-based curriculum."

*"The first thing that has to be formed with students is flexibility in thinking because this will generate their creativities (sic). One will not be creative if he or she is rigid in thinking."*

Last week he suggested a rigidity of thinking which beggars belief. Regarding a 14 year old schoolgirl who'd been kidnapped and raped by alleged human traffickers, he told reporters that cases of teenage rape were sometimes the victims' fault. *"Sometimes it can be intentional. They do it for fun and then the girl alleges that it's rape."*

Nuh later told the Post that his statement was taken out of context.

What context?

Upon returning to her school, teachers informed the other students that she had brought shame upon the school.

That context?

And now, in today's Post we read that His Excrecence says that he is against the teaching of sex education in schools because "according to our traditions, it is indecent to talk about it."

Moreover, he told the Post, he has no knowledge about reproductive education. *"I am sorry, talking about s-e-x is already taboo to me."*

Well, given that it is reported your daughter is living in Duisburg, Germany, and *"is in a relationship with Berto Mulia Wibawa from Surabaya"*, may we ask how she learned about the birds and the bees?

By trial and error and much fumbling?

After all, Minister, that is how you are conducting yourself and, as you say, *"We didn't get education on reproduction when we were children, but we learned that from our families. Considering the high privacy level of this topic, it is more suitable if the family played a dominant role."*

Well Minister, as the third child of 10 brothers and the father of one daughter, did you learn nothing from your parents?

BTW. Why has the Minister for Women's Empowerment & Child Protection Linda Amalia Sari Gumelar, and a mother of two, said nothing?



**Doing it for fun?**

Published: <http://jakartass.net/2012/10/image-of-the-week-39-playtime/>

## Government to Instil Character in Children.

Yep, that's the latest wheeze emanating from within the corridors of power.

Excuse me while I guffaw.



There, that feels better, so now for the reality check.

The Coordinating Public Welfare Minister's Office met with several groups on Thursday to receive comments on which values schoolchildren should be taught. The office's deputy for education and religion, Agus Sartono, said, "*We already have rich values from Indonesia's indigenous characters. For example, we can find 36 traits [to develop people] who are creative, smart and polite based on Pancasila, the country's foundation.*"

This is a partial selection of suggested 'good traits' emanating from the meeting:

honesty  
empathy  
creativity  
tolerance  
self control  
responsibility  
a love of peace  
positive thinking  
pride in being Indonesian  
an appreciation of pluralism  
perseverance and achievement seeking  
unity and *gotong royong* (community joint effort)

You can't disagree with any of those. 'Honesty' heads this list purely for my artistic tendency. However, given that the stated goal is "*to shape a better generation than the current one*" then it deserves its position. After all, given just a few headlines from last week's Jakarta Post, it shouldn't be difficult.

- **Letter: Change the 'graft culture'**
- **Banten is 15th most corrupt province**
- **Corrupt judge gets light 2-year sentence**

Agus said the program would be expanded into a national framework that included every ministry, with the National Education Ministry and the Religious Affairs Ministry taking the lead.

That's like asking a fox to teach hens how to lay eggs.

About Rp. 221 trillion (US\$24.8 billion), or 20% of the 2010 state budget, is allocated for education - as required by the Constitution. However, just over 70% is reportedly being used to "train civil servants", which may include teachers. However, the majority of the nation's teachers don't have that status.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has just published a Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) which assessed 15 year old students on their Reading skills, Mathematics and Science, all from the perspective of the value of these subjects in the 'real' world.

This makes grim reading for Indonesia which was ranked 58th of the 65 countries in the survey.

With the average scores in brackets, these were the Indonesia results:

- **Reading: 402 (493)**
- **Maths: 371 (496)**
- **Science: 393 (501)**

The reliance on multi-choice national exams is obviously one factor as they rule out creativity, now deemed to be an important part of one's character.

Back in July, the Corruption Eradication Commission found 48 'weaknesses' in haj management by the Religious Affairs Ministry which were prone to graft. **Commission deputy chairman M. Jasin said the loopholes could be found in virtually all aspects of haj management, which has long been criticized for lacking transparency.**

Given the other factors to be inculcated, like tolerance, self-control and *gotong royong*, it's surely time for the Religious Affairs Ministry to rein in the Front Pembeli Islam thugs.

Various folk have highlighted **the importance of parents and society being involved in [character building] education so students can get accustomed to those positive traits in school and at home.**

I totally agree: nurturing young people is a partnership.

However, I don't wish to be a partner with those hypocrites who blithely ignore the harm that they are doing to their citizens, of all ages.

## Recycled Libraries

*"Indonesia needs critical thinkers and problem solvers and this can only be achieved through a cultural shift, through formal education and access to ideas."*

Regular visitors here will also know how much I value books, so much so that I now write about them, and it is the act of writing and rewriting which informs much of my thinking and frames my opinions.

Yes, I've always got a 'book on the go', for those times when I'm stuck in a traffic jam or waiting for a friend in Ya 'Usual and wish to escape my surroundings by exploring the worlds captured in print.

Sadly, I think I've only seen a handful of Indonesians reading fiction on a bus or train, and they are the few who don't trip over themselves, and others, because they're engrossed in a non-essential selfie or gif on their 'smart' phones.

Very few Indonesians now lack the basic literacy which allows you to read traffic signs and advertisements, but few read the kind which fosters creative thinking: fiction. They prefer the alternative 'reality' of a *cinetron* (soap opera).

Culture and Education Minister Anies Baswedan recognises that the country still lacks a healthy reading culture. He is supporting an initiative to remedy this situation, starting with school children. They are about to join the School Literacy Movement, outlined in Ministerial Regulation No. 23/2015. This is a mandatory scheme that promotes reading (of any type of non-textbook) for 15 minutes before the start of the day's lessons.

I don't like the use of the word 'mandatory'. The freedom to read should be a personal compulsion, one to be met in free time. However, perhaps the intent is to educate parents and teachers about the importance of allowing children the freedom to use their imaginations, to examine the many worlds in the index of possibilities.

Nila Tanzil is one of a number of pioneers who have recognised this in recent years. She founded Taman Bacaan Pelangi in 2009, and has now established some 60 libraries in the remoter parts of Eastern Indonesia.



Donations of children's books, suitable for ages 5-13, are welcomed at 'drop off' points in Perplus Bookstores in Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya and Bali.

An edit of <http://jakartass.net/2016/07/image-of-the-week-219-recycled-library/>

## 2b or Not 2b?

**"Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything learned in school."**

- Albert Einstein



"The entire schooling system with its emphasis on assessment and marking is geared towards the end result: the grade rather than the content, and this led to a feeling I would have been better off going home to study independently."

- Harry Cunningham, studying English at Loughborough University (UK)

We need to stop thinking of our brains as filing cabinets, and treat them more like the creative, indulgent creatures that they are.

- Tristan Verboven, editor in chief of *The Class Struggle*

**"The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one."**

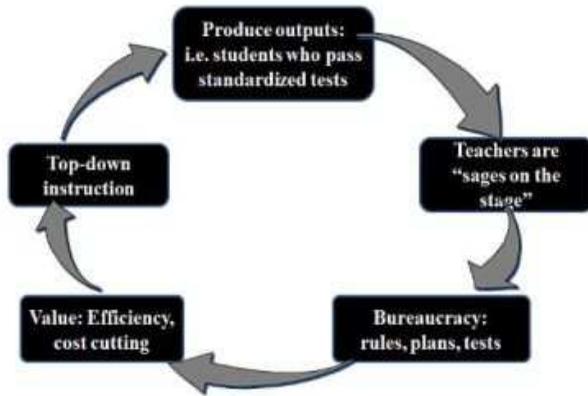
- Malcolm Forbes



"If we first teach children how to learn, they will not only learn the 'basics' but more and in much greater depth."

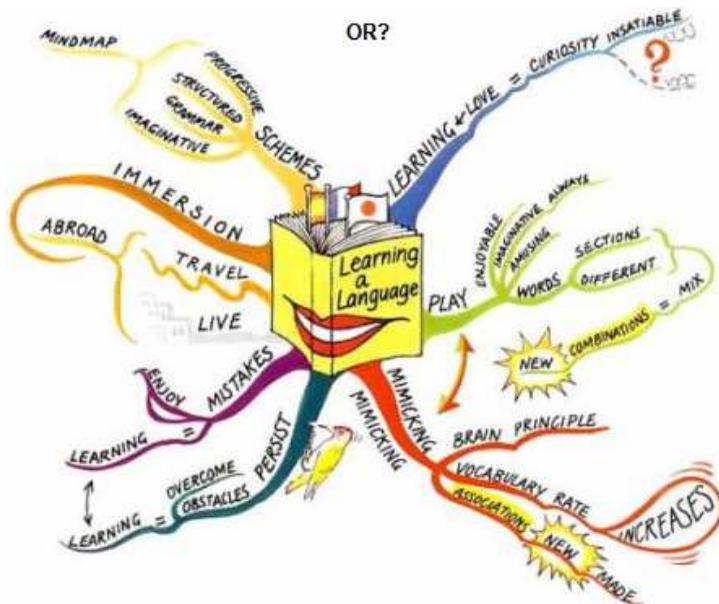
- Tony Buzan, inventor of Mind Maps

## The principles of traditional education



The principles are mutually reinforcing & interlocking

OR?



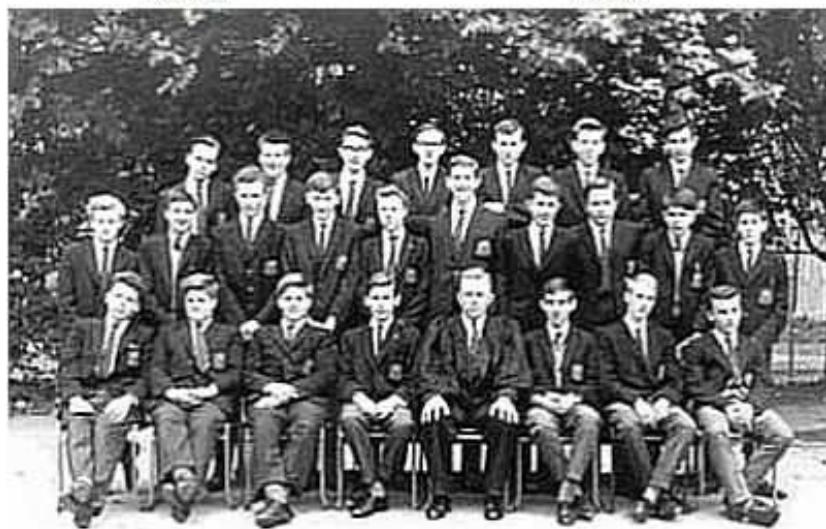
**The writer's school years ...**



**TC at 7**



**At 14**



**Not my class, but ...**