

# **The Spirit of Adventure: Protecting and Expanding Children's Most Precious Asset**

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# Caring – for what?

- ◆ We're not just keeping kids safe (or busy)
- ◆ We're steering their growth
- ◆ By what values?



# Child care: the questions

- ◆ What do we want for them?
- ◆ What will they need?
- ◆ How can we help them get it?
  
- ◆ What will their world be like?
- ◆ What do they already have?

# ‘We just want them to be happy...’

## ◆ But what does that mean?

– Material wealth?

◆ Not beyond a certain point

– Absence of bad feeling?

◆ Too much control is dangerous and dull

– Pursuing worthwhile goals with reasonable confidence and success?

◆ ‘what’s won is done; soul’s joy lies in the doing’ (Troilus and Cressida)

◆ ‘self-esteem is much more potent when it is won through striving wholeheartedly for worthwhile ends’ (Carol Dweck)

# We say we're happy when

- ◆ we are

- Engaging with a worthwhile challenge
- Where there is hope of success
- Progress is made
- Full absorption is possible
- Feedback is clear and impersonal
- Self-consciousness (anxiety, self-doubt) drops away

- ◆ Csikszentmihalyi 2002

# Now more than ever, learning is key (life makes your head spin)

- ◆ complex families, cosmetic surgery, street crime, religious choice, gay rights, global warming, cheap flights, Facebook, girl power, credit crunch, greed and corruption, cognitive enhancers, skunk cannabis, global news, instant porn, nobody to hate, peer pressure, Celebrity Big Brother, exam pressure...
- ◆ What matters?
- ◆ Where is 'home'?
- ◆ Who to trust?
- ◆ How to love?
- ◆ Who to be?
- ◆ What do I need to learn?

# Uncertainty without insecurity

“Most young people fear that their world will generally become more challenging... [For many] their lives are riddled with insecurity; insecurity becomes an integral part of growing up... Schools are seen as failing to equip young people with the ability to learn for life rather than exams... “They need to teach the knowledge but they never teach you how to learn.”  
Industry Society Report.

# Power-minding!

- ◆ Our job is to help all young people develop the qualities of mind that will enable them to face all kinds of tricky stuff – the nature of which we cannot foresee – with confidence, capability and enthusiasm.



# Clues from the real world...

- ◆ We need to find out what real people really do, notice, feel and believe to be happy learners
  - Looking backwards, from successful grown-ups, as well as forwards, from what children are endowed with...

- ◆ Investigating – gathering information and ideas
  - Just looking and listening - patient attention
  - Watching role models (Mayan vs. American)
  - Nicking and adapting ideas and techniques
  - Reading
    - ◆ with pleasure
  - Identifying and checking sources
    - ◆ (e.g. Dunbar's scientists; Wikipedia)



# ◆ Experimenting – trying things out

- Thinking in the making

  - ◆ Using sketches, diagrams, models, metaphors

  - ◆ e.g. the Toyota Production System

- Jamming, improvising, messing about

- Practising

  - ◆ Working on the hard parts; re-embedding

- Performing under pressure

  - ◆ Getting 'match fit'

## ◆ Imagining – the mind's rehearsal studio

– Mental simulation

◆ Running scenarios (Klein, Tesla)

– Other people's shoes

◆ Multiplying perspectives (Gandhi, Ortony)

– Reverie / day-dreaming

◆ creativity

– Intuitive guidance / feeling of rightness  
(ResCen artists, Science Nobel laureates)

◆ Hunches, promptings, inklings

◆ Imagination is not childish

## ◆ Thinking and discussing – use your words

- Exploring consequences

  - ◆ Weighing up pros and cons

- Debate (Pontecorvo; Morris and Winston)

- Sharing drafts – ‘talking it out’

- Giving and taking feedback (‘impersonal’)

  - ◆ ‘agonistic support’ (Dunbar)

## ◆ But not too much... not the cuckoo in the nest

# Loving to explore: attitudes as well as skills

- ◆ Curiosity
  - Wondering, doubting, questioning
- ◆ Bravery
  - Risking, persisting, being patient
- ◆ Sociability
  - Sharing, supporting, open-minded
- ◆ Thoughtfulness
  - Standing back, planning, self-awareness

# Are we raising explorers or robots?



<b>The explorer</b>	<b>The robot</b>
Curious	Passive
Brave	Fearful
Investigative	Credulous
Experimental	Repetitive
Imaginative	Literal
Disciplined	Dogmatic
Sociable	Competitive
Reflective	Robotic

# What does it take to make a powerful learner?

- ◆ Imbuing these values into the culture of the centre
  - How we talk
  - What we model
  - The activities and choices we create
  - The environment and resources we provide

# Laying the foundations for eager and able lifelong learners

- ◆ Structure and freedom - authoritative coaching
- ◆ Peripheral participation – watching and pitching in to real activity
  - learning to debate (Pontecorvo; Rogoff)
- ◆ Be an example (Einstein)
  - learning and thinking alongside children
- ◆ Plenty of time to mess about
  - Angus's 'don't know'
- ◆ Personal bests: recording, celebrating and revisiting
- ◆ Learning heroes and adventure stories

# The seven deadly sins

learning power can be shrunk as well as boosted

- ◆ Teaching too much
  - Indulging our need for efficacy and control
- ◆ Over-praising and over-rescuing
- ◆ Thinking too much
- ◆ ;Pre-school': dissing the practical and manual
- ◆ Labelling and boxing
  - Handing on our prejudices
  - Reducing our complexity
- ◆ Modelling dogmatism, passivity, saintliness, panic or impatience
- ◆ Impoverished environments

# Child care – the answers

- ◆ What do we want for them? **Happiness**
- ◆ What will their world be like? **Complicated**
- ◆ What do they already have? **Natural learning ability**
- ◆ What will they need? **Expanded learning power**
- ◆ How can we help them get it? **Through talk, modelling, activities, etc.**

# The take-home messages

- ◆ We must all protect and nurture Learning Power; not damage and neglect it.
- ◆ 'Learnacy' is more important than literacy – and MUCH more important than numeracy
- ◆ Tinsel, fine words and good intentions are not enough – we have to get serious
- ◆ This means changing some of *our* habits
- ◆ The issue is not financial or political; it is our own commitment, courage and imagination

# Happy kids

What do we want?

Active, inquisitive,  
sceptical, creative,  
open-minded  
citizens

When do we want  
them?

NOW!



**Whatever you can do, or  
think you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power  
and magic in it.  
BEGIN IT NOW.**

Goethe

A stylized silhouette of a mountain range in shades of teal, located at the bottom right of the slide.