

Re: Darwin, Evolution, the Animal Kingdom, and Man

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From: Wolf Kirchmeir (wwolfkir_at_sympatico.ca)

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Greg Alexander wrote:

[...]

>> "Wolf Kirchmeir" <wwolfkir@sympatico.ca> wrote:

[...]

>>> *Have we humans figured out how to pass on our knowledge? Yes, but*

>>> *not*

>>> *very well. If we really knew how to do it, and if we also knew what*

>>> *knowledge was worth passing on, human society would become pretty*

>>> *well perfect within a generation or two.*

> *I hadn't thought of it that way. Hmmm!*

> *Is there a field focussed on how to pass on knowledge more*

> *effectively. I mean, psychology has the application side, and the*

> *research side is relatively distinct. But teaching is largely*

> *application. Does sociology research learning?*

> *I wonder how our learning systems could be improved.*

[...]

>

> *Just my thoughts :)*

> *Greg*

Yes, our teaching-learning systems can be improved, but it's a hard slog. We know very little, and basically all we can do is wait for a child to exhibit some behaviour like the one desired, and then shape it. Sadly, curricula imposed on teachers and students assume that behaviours can be imposed or created rather than shaped, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

IMO, the only attempt to understand learning that have had any success is EAB, in all its guises (many people who use EAB principles in their educational research either don't acknowledge that they are doing so, or explicitly deny it – there's some sort of political correctness at work here. Bah!).

EAB shows that certain kinds of learning can be rather easily induced and controlled — that is, any existing behaviour is more or less easily

shaped. The kind of learning we expect children to do in schools works only with such behaviours. For example, it's quite easy to teach young children to play games. Young children engage in game-playing without being prompted, so shaping this behaviour (eg, teaching chess, basketball, etc) is easy. For this reason, if some desired skills can be incorporated into games, game-playing is an effective teaching method, as all teachers know, and most teachers do (there are unfortunately some teachers and parents who believe that learning and fun are mutually exclusive.)

Similar observations apply to, for example, "critical thinking skills." Humans exhibit such behaviour from about mid-puberty on. (It's one of the reasons for the difficulties between parents and teenage children.) Given critical thinking behaviour, it's relatively easy to shape it, eg, to develop "rules of clear thinking". The student must of course be willing to cooperate with the teacher, but in my experience, most students want to cooperate.

As for "knowledge as such", observe that children from about 6 to 10 years of age equate "being smart" with "knowing stuff." That IMO is a clue as to how to proceed. Children resist acquiring knowledge that's "boring," so the trick is to make it interesting enough that the child will go to the effort of learning "stuff" that you want him or her to learn. That merely involves finding a link between the stuff the child likes knowing, and what you want him to know – IOW, it involves observing the actual behaviour of the child, and shaping it, rather than imposing some paradigm on it. Again, that's what successful teachers do.

BTW, all the above "teaching strategies" were explicitly taught in my pedagogical training. NB that whatever the current educational jargon, at bottom it's all about shaping behaviours.