

Peter Shepherd

***Are We All
Born Equal?***

A glowing blue wireframe human head and neck, shown in profile. Inside the head, several gears of various sizes are visible, suggesting a mechanical or cognitive theme. The entire image has a dark, almost black background.

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Trans4mind

Are We All Born Equal?

Peter Shepherd

The short answer: yes, but not the same, not by a long chalk.

All persons have the same qualitative make-up; we are born equal in this respect, as recognized in the values of 'Liberty, Fraternity, Equality.' All human beings have the same reflexes, instincts, drives, needs, capacities, and rights; all have the same powers of perception, discrimination, attentiveness, retentiveness, reasoning, and so forth.

The differences between persons are quantitative rather than qualitative. 'Equality' is to do with our qualities and our rights, which we all share, but not the degree to which they are developed or expressed.

Behavioral psychology has installed the idea that we inherit all of our traits, and besides the modifying effects of cultural conditioning that we stay basically the same as our genetic hard-wiring dictates. That's true if you don't do anything about making positive change, if you don't recognize the aspects of yourself that are more than animal. Recently many have recognized this possibility and they are looking for valid information that can help them make positive changes.

We each differ in the degree of our various spiritual, mental, emotional and physical abilities, and in the manner in which the amounts of the

various traits combine in our individuality. A wide range of aptitude, personality, learning and intelligence tests will show differences as high as 25:1 from person to person, with a characteristic bell-shaped distribution curve, in much the same way as physical characteristics are varied.

It is these quantities, which are such an important factor in personal competence, creativity and ultimately our success in life, which personal development aims to increase. It is through our differences that we are able to express our individuality and achieve unique goals.

I feel that it is a mistake to belittle the differences between individuals due to a fear of being seen as judgmental or non-accepting of a person who has little of certain qualities. It is much better to be realistic (which is truly to be non-judgmental and accepting) and recognize the strength and weakness of our various qualities. Then we can take advantage of the opportunities which are available to develop and improve ourselves, toward the goal of fulfilling our potential.

This sets the stage for both mental and personal development, whereby we make a self-directed effort to improve our personal education, to learn new cognitive skills and to replace negative habits with positive ones. It's something we all can do, if we want. We are equal in that respect, in that we all have this opportunity.

The Knowledge Net

About sixty years ago educators came to the conclusion that rote learning was not a very efficient way of instructing a student. Rote learning was phased out and replaced with the modern method of instruction. Since the middle ages until about 1945, education was near synonymous with rote learning. Students may have gained something from the modern liberal approach, if they are fortunate to have excellent teachers, but all too often they have also lost something

important, because the modern methods usually do not include adequate means for clarifying and memorizing information - all too often it is half understood and (post the exam) almost immediately forgotten.

Many of our parents went through the earlier strict type of education. As adults, they were able to quote verbatim from the Iliad, American and British Literature, History, Geography and General Science. This gave them in many cases a certain charisma; they could speak and write with impact and most importantly, they had a sense of certainty in a troubled and changing world. Later generations, to a significant extent, have lost this sense of certainty, achieved through having a wide and well-connected structure of knowledge.

Memory & Identity

Global structures of meaning play a primary role in the cognitive processes behind discourse. Furthermore, without a large body of secure data, individuals frequently have identity problems. Long term memory content therefore plays a crucial role in creating our identity. In short, without the capital of stable data standing behind us, in everything we are and do, we have a shaky sense of our identity and very little certainty.

According to Hunter in his classic book on memory, people with a poor long term memory are very easily socially conditioned. In modern terms, they are field-dependent and other-directed. To be Self Directed one needs a strong sense of identity, and memory is a crucial factor in this. We need to remember our beliefs and values; our methods for doing many tasks and learned solutions; our likes and dislikes; who we know and what we think of them; our personal history; and our learning of all subjects including our career skills. So

a person's entire knowledge net is largely the structure of their character.

All memory is important, especially long term memory, and the most important part of long term memory is our knowledge net. Our knowledge net starts to expand from shortly after birth and in ideal cases continues to expand until shortly before death. An evolved knowledge net is a context in which all new information can be compared and evaluated, and hence valued and understood. Wisdom and charisma, through insight and certainty, result.

A minimal knowledge net results in a person who is like reeds in the wind, swaying in whatever directions the influences upon him dictate. Without our knowledge net, we would be like a goldfish; we would be nothing. Almost every facet of personality and consciousness stems from our knowledge net. Our character, the capacity to keep our head in a sea of troubles, the capacity to express ourselves and understand language, our identity and the well springs of Ego itself, stem from the knowledge net.

Most systems of brainwashing work at trying to break down this structure, so a person loses sight of who he is. A person with a poorly formed knowledge net, with only a limited content, has a weak Ego. He lacks presence and charisma. This may call to mind the type of school teacher who tries to give a lecture whilst he faces toward the blackboard. People with a limited data base are often full of opinions but unfounded ones, because they lack stable and well-connected data. An extreme example is that of a famous idiot savant who was taken to see a play. He was able to count the number of words spoken but the play went straight over his head. Without a significant and relevant data base he was unable to relate to the content of the play.

Self-Directed Education

Before Malcolm X went into prison he was street-wise and a natural leader. However, as he began to write letters to a wide variety of people, he became frustrated with the fact that he could not communicate with them as he wanted to. "It was because of these letters that I happened to stumble upon, that I started to acquire some kind of homemade education." He was frustrated because he had been the most articulate hustler on the streets of Harlem, and could get anyone's attention with his words. He was not used to being ignored but now it was hard for him to communicate.

It was equally hard for him to keep up with events because he could never fully understand what he was reading. So he decided that he needed to learn how to read and write properly and that the best way to go about it would be to get a hold of a copy of a dictionary and study it. He decided that the best place to start would be at the beginning, with the A's. So he just started copying. He copied every word and punctuation mark on the first page. It took him the entire day, and when he finished he read aloud what he had written, over and over again. The next day he woke up thinking about the words that he had written and to his surprise, he even remembered what some of them meant. As his word-base broadened he was able to pick up a book and read it all the way through.

He went on to spend all of his free time reading, and acquired a much wider knowledge base. As he later said, "I had never been so truly free in my life." As a result he also became an articulate writer and was able to obtain a much greater world-wide influence, even from within prison, as a result of his own writing.

By the mid-twentieth century, scientific and technological knowledge far outstripped the ability of most people, even the moderately well

informed, to comprehend it. The aim of most specialists is to know ever more about their own specific niche. However the corollary to a small minority knowing more and more about less and less, is a large majority knowing less and less about more and more. It becomes overwhelming to the average person and even the specialist may know little about his own colleagues' work. To turn this around we need an ongoing self-directed education, not attempting to know everything but to understand very clearly the basic principles of a wide range of subjects, so that the detailed information can be placed in a reasonable context.

It is only in the context of a wide knowledge net that intelligent and creative connections may be made between disparate information, and so we have the challenge of developing an encyclopedic knowledge that covers enough bases with sufficient depth, to be able to make sense of new information and to perceive the opportunities that arise thereby. The immense and ever-growing resources of literature and the Internet are only valuable to the degree that their data can be related to the knowledge net that already exists within our own minds.

The human brain has immense capacity for interconnectedness, far more than any supercomputer. It's pattern recognition capability enables us to perceive the connections between ideas, people and events - all the contents of our knowledge net - and to be able to know what is relevant and important in any particular context. That process, however, depends on our ability to remember.

Knowledge Itself Promotes Memory

Significant evidence demonstrates a superior memory in those experts and individuals who know a great deal about a specific domain of knowledge. Memory for a certain type of material improves

with practice, such as with naturally reoccurring situations. To take a simple example, the amount of knowledge of soccer was found to be a powerful determinant of subjects' recall of newly presented scores for recent soccer matches. This can be attributed to improved organizational processing with a wider and more detailed context, and also to better recognition of the similarities and differences between the items in question.

Mnemonics

Through the use of mnemonics technology (devices for assisting the memory), in conjunction with a couple or three years of part-time study, we can gain the sort of data base enjoyed by our forefathers, in an expanded and modern context, and along with it a greater sense of certainty and a greater security in our identity.

The key is the use of visual images in an ordered, spatial arrangement that relate to the abstract ideas and enable us to remember them. Human memory recalls concrete images far more easily than abstract ideas, especially images with an emotional endowment, and it remembers an ordered chain of associations more accurately than a random assortment. By the use of mnemonics - using chains of association to connect one memory with another - new information is encoded in such a way that it is connected to previously stored data, such that it is not easily forgotten.

The wider the existing knowledge net, the easier it is to find such useful connections, so the process is cumulative and accelerating. However, modern mnemonics technology works so much better than the old ways of rote memorization, that even a little experience with these techniques can make a startling difference. One is on the way to acquiring a greater state of memory. The knowledge net is

effectively a crystallized intelligence that acts as an expansive resource for the fluid intelligence of one's working memory.

Freedom to Change

Implicit in any concept of learning is the notion of change. If we learn something, we change some part of ourselves: our attitude, behavior, values, assumptions, or perhaps the amount of knowledge we have. The change may mean a rejection or an alteration of previously accepted beliefs or behavior, or it may mean an expansion or extension of them.

Change is often perceived as frightening as it threatens to rob us of the safety and legitimacy of our personal, often cherished, position and boundaries - especially since maintaining this safe space has helped us to survive as well as we have up to now (even if that's not as well as we could do).

When change is demanded by another person or new circumstances, we tend to feel threatened, defensive and perhaps rushed. The new learning is not perceived as something desirable and of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning.

To turn this around, we need to be proactive in our learning, to expand our knowledge and abilities in advance of forced changes of circumstance. If there's one thing guaranteed in our lives it is that change will be upon us, sooner or later; usually sooner. If we are open to change, and are willing to learn whatever is necessary to predict and adapt to it, we can even become its master and control its direction. Self-directed learning is therefore key to mastery over life and to the creation of the life that we want.

Many people had bad experiences at school and perhaps later in life, when attempting to study a new subject. It is easy to quickly get bogged down with new terminology, and often new concepts and procedures seem unclear. This situation can quickly get out of hand as the student gets left behind and the subject either becomes an ongoing struggle or it is abandoned. But none of that is necessary; it is possible to succeed with the study of any subject.

The problem

A large number of individuals are limited by their cognitive development to a "concrete" level of thinking, in which they can only think usefully about actual physical objects and events. Outside of a particular context the underlying principles do not transfer. Abstract reasoning is beyond them, or uncomfortable for them, so they are unable to fully participate and profit from education at a higher level. These are the people who cannot apply what they have learned, because the abstract and the concrete are two unconnected things for them: the result is a mind-body split.

The value of reading

Why has this occurred? Young people read far fewer serious books today and spend less time in intellectual discussion; in contrast, they spend many more hours in watching TV programs with little or no intellectual content: MTV, soaps and sport. Many young people have been brought up on the 30 second sound bite and pap, so their attention span is shorter than it was before, their vocabulary is much reduced, and many fail to achieve communication competence and literacy. The pleasure principle has taken over from the reality principle; immediate gratification rules supreme. Those who depend on TV and video games for stimulation do not have the disposition to think abstractly nor the training to do so well; they are on the

receiving end and have no chance to think creatively. They do not benefit from the stimulation of imagination that reading provides.

What used to be an exaggerated concentration on left-brain education in Western countries - written verbal and mathematical skills - has switched over to under-development of left-brain skills. We need both left and right brain developed and functioning in a mutually supportive role. We need both knowledge and intuition - mind, body and spirit in unison - in order to be a self-directed, open-minded and free person.

Our left-brain skills need to be developed in an active manner. As we write creatively, we express our feelings, and we develop an witnessing viewpoint, as with the benefits of mindfulness meditation. As we read or listen actively, our imagination is given full expression; we gain understanding of others and empathy with their differing views and feelings. We develop a long attention span: long enough to achieve great things. None of these benefits obtain from the passive process of watching TV and the accompanying adverts. Instead our minds switch off, we lose discernment and become wide-open to hypnotic suggestion. The cultural trance sets in.

A hard time at school

If one gets behind in studying a subject, it becomes harder and harder to keep up, until the teaching becomes incomprehensible. In the case of reading, this also has a carry-over effect on the other subjects, for which reading skills are pre-requisite. This is called the "Matthew Effect" by psychologists. If a pupil has reading difficulties at the start of his education, he will fall further and further behind through the years of his education at junior school. His or her brain may have been slow to develop, maintaining the dream-like Theta

brain waves of infancy at a high level, making it hard to focus on learning.

Unless he has individual remedial support, the pupil will probably give up studies altogether at secondary school, and his IQ will drop by more than twenty points - even though it may have been well above average when tested as a small child. As our reading course will teach the basic and advanced reading skills that few students ever fully acquire, this makes it possible to accelerate in learning skills as an adult, and overtake those who had moved ahead back in school days. As a consequence, this course can increase a student's IQ by ten points or more, which makes a great deal of difference in real-life aptitude and career opportunities.

Even for those of us who had a good education, if we forget all that we learned and never exercise our mental skills with new and challenging tasks, our reasoning ability and effective IQ will deteriorate. We may have an established expertise at work but for most of our time make the minimum mental effort. It is a fallacy that IQ and mental capacity is inbuilt and unchanging. Like physical fitness, if you don't use it you will lose it!

As yet, this downward trend continues and the situation deteriorates with each year that passes. Ultimately, this could even spell the end of our free democracies, which require participants to have an aware and critical mind. Can anything be done about it?

The Mind Development Courses

The renowned [*Mind Development Courses*](#) are now freely available online here at Trans4mind! They provide the tools for a re-education of your cognitive skills. Literally, you can transform your mind!

Over the course of many years Gregory Mitchell, one of the world's foremost experts on brain processes and body-mind integration, has refined techniques for helping individuals to achieve their potential mental capacity. The techniques of **Mind Development** make the mind much more efficient because they open up the pathways of left-right brain communication and assist the person to regain all of their positive mental energy. They can then obtain the goals they want and take control of their destiny.

- * [**Super Vision**](#) demonstrates the amazing changes in mental capacity that can be created by effective techniques training perception, and illustrates how closely mind and body function in coordination.

- * [**Effective Communication**](#) is a practical course to help you transform your personal relationships through improving your communication skills.

- * If you are concentrating you are awake and aware - your mental life is both intensified and broadened. Are there are ways to improve your concentration directly? Yes, and this course teaches the best of them: [**Concentration: Educating the Will.**](#)

- * [**How to Study**](#) presents the foundation skills necessary for mind development. Learn how to study with maximum comprehension, recall and ability to apply what you have learned effectively.

- * With the [**Power Reading**](#) course you can double your reading speed and be able to evaluate what you have read with clear and incisive intelligence... essential ingredients to success in your profession and in your continuing education.

* Memory is key to cognitive enhancement. To memorize easily, we need to restore and integrate our creative right-brain processes. With Ken Ward's [Creative Memory](#) course you find out how to learn facts, figures, names - anything you need - and be able to easily and quickly recall them. ###

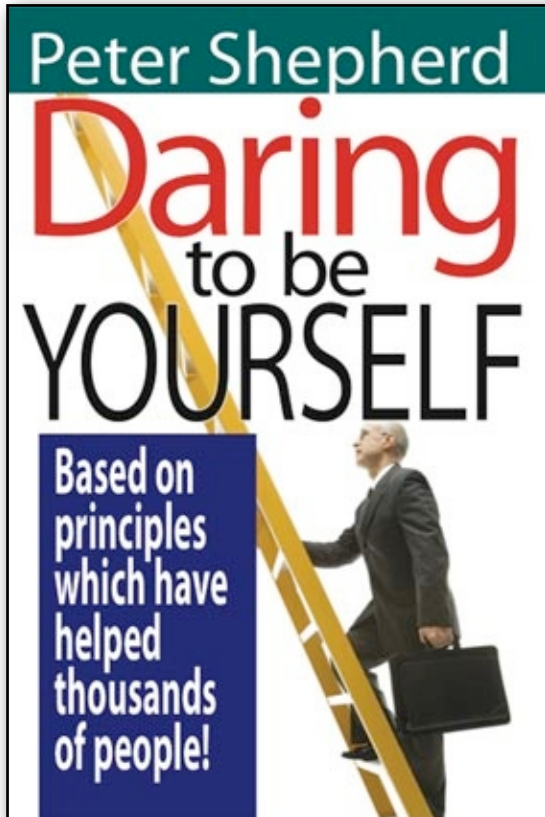
For full details of The Mind Development Courses go to:

<http://www.trans4mind.com/mind-development/>

Peter Shepherd (co-editor of this magazine) is a psychologist and writer, who works particularly in the field of personal development and runs the web site, [Trans4mind.com](http://www.trans4mind.com). Born in London in 1952, he spent most of his life in England before moving to France to be with his wife, Nicole. Trained both as a rational-emotive and transpersonal psychotherapist, Peter combines these techniques in his own system of transformational psychology, applied to personal growth rather than therapy.

For several years, Peter worked with Gregory Mitchell, running the Mind Development Courses in London. Peter's book, *Transforming the Mind*, widely influenced by Gregory's mentorship, was the foundation of the Trans4mind web site, which over 10 years has expanded to become one of the top personal development portals on the Internet.

More recently, Peter wrote ***Daring to Be Yourself*** - a "best of" selection from the Trans4mind site - which gives the reader the tools to turn their life around.



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