

The Concept of Now: Adults vs Kids

by Dom Testa

October, 2008

There's a strong movement today to encourage people to live in the present moment, or, as many authors have expressed it, to "live in the now." They tell us that too many adults obsess over the past, or worry about a future that no one can predict, both of which jeopardize our ability to appreciate the blessings we have around us today.

I think this is great advice for our stressed-out, over-scheduled, over-caffeinated adult world. Ironically, however, when it comes to kids, the problem is that they can ONLY focus on the Now. This is one of the primary challenges in education, and an important component in the mission of The Big Brain Club.

The average middle school student is so obsessed with what's buzzing around them right now, and is so self-absorbed and fixated on what their friends think is hot right now, that they have no ability to contemplate what might happen tomorrow, and certainly not five years from now. Their universe is today.

It's why so often parents will shake their heads and say, "Didn't you think of the consequences before you did that? What were you thinking?"

Well, they weren't thinking about the consequences, because their brains are not hard-wired to look more than five minutes down the road. They can't imagine how what they do today influences tomorrow. That's the connection with education: How kids behave in the classroom, how they approach their education, in their minds has nothing to do with their future. The only thing they know is that someone will yell at them if they miss today's homework assignment.

The answer, as strange as it may sound, is to get kids to somehow glimpse the future.

It's the reason why, when I speak at schools about The Big Brain Club, I give them the cold, hard truth. We talk about how many times it seems the most important thing in their universe is to be accepted by their peers, to fit in, to be considered cool. Hey, it's human nature, right?

But then I drop the bomb on them. I tell them that the day they walk out of high school – the very day! – and then for the rest of their lives, the number of people who will care about how cool they were in school is...zero. They will have made it the most important thing in their life, and yet within the next four to five years, nobody will care.

Kids are under an immense amount of pressure in school to go along in order to get along. If that means that they sacrifice much of their education in order to seem cool, then too often they crumble. The fact that they are so focused on the Now actually hurts them.

It's difficult to get kids to dedicate too much brain power to their future. Questions like "What do you want to do with your life?" are a bit overpowering and intimidating, primarily because that's not the way they're programmed. The answer lies in getting them to look just barely around the corner,

and to put it in perspective with what they're experiencing today. That's why pointing out the consequences of today's actions has a bit more effect; once you show a teenager that they're being manipulated by their peers, they're likely to take notice.

Adults could probably stand a bit more focus on the Now. Young people, on the other hand, could do with a little less.

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