
A Reflection from Dr. Gold

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These are extraordinary times and as we are all trying to adjust to novel circumstances, I have been thinking a lot about putting our individual and collective experiences into perspective. I wanted to share my thoughts with all of you, both staff and parents, for your consideration.

In making my reflections and comments I am considering my more than 73 years of life, my personal experiences, and I hope some wisdom that I have gained over the years. People of my age have experienced many challenges and uncertainties including the Cold War, polio epidemic, Kennedy and King assassinations, Vietnam War, AIDS epidemic, 9/11, the 2008 recession, and now the coronavirus. I have been personally affected by all of these and have faced the challenge of coping with my own safety, health, faith in government, and the economy. Having experienced all of these events and challenges, I have learned to put both normal daily events and exceptional ones in perspective.

This coronavirus epidemic is new to all of us, and we are experiencing so much uncertainty about the degree of transmission. Even with the years of polio epidemics prior to 1955, schools were never closed – though I should say that I missed four months of school when I had polio when I was eight years old in 1954. When I was growing up I worried about World War III and nuclear attack – again years of uncertainty, and fears that I had no control over as a student.

I have learned over the years that we humans have resilience and creativity in learning to cope with all of these unexpected and difficult emotional and physical situations. What I have also learned is that out of these crises often comes silver linings and opportunities that we don't expect. As I have pondered this coronavirus, I have developed some thoughts about how we all are handling this and maybe could rethink some of our reactions.



First, what is most important is shelter, food, safety, and health. This is a situation over which we have little control, but we can keep ourselves safe. Some of us are challenged by loss of jobs or money and must think about that and reach out for help and assistance. So, where does education fall? No one is more supportive of education than I am; I wouldn't be doing my job for 44 years if I didn't believe in the value of education. Yet, in this situation, education takes second place after basic needs are met. I am not saying that we shouldn't be trying to have our children and students learn, but physical and mental health come first.

Over the past few weeks I have become aware of the stress and pressure that teachers, parents, and students are all feeling by doing distance learning. I am very supportive of structure and having kids continue to learn, but I think we need to put all of this in perspective regarding how critical it is to lose some months of classroom education. **Our children will continue to learn.** Not only will they learn from books and online learning, but this is an opportunity to be creative, to learn practical life skills, and learn how to handle challenging situations. I have been thinking about my more than 25 years of experience observing 5th graders at Outdoor Education when they are not in the classroom and thrive and learn in a different setting.



As I said earlier, this can be an opportunity for silver linings. How often have I talked to parents about how overscheduled kids are these days? You have your children until they're 18, and that's all. Take this opportunity to really enjoy the time you have together.

Involve them in planning fun family activities that you can all enjoy – games, movies, learning something new together. These past few weeks I have felt that life is in slow motion; it is just as hard for me to adjust to that as it is for anyone else, I'm sure. I have grappled with my own sense of feeling useless as I'm not having the many contacts and engaging in the satisfying work that I usually do.

And yet, slowing down is not a bad thing. You are not bad teachers if you don't teach your students everything that you normally would. You are not bad parents if your children don't learn everything you expect them to by June. Remember, students all over the country and all over the world are experiencing this lack of classroom instruction. (Recall that I lost four months of school and ended up with a Ph.D.)

I know we live in a highly competitive community and there are always parental fears about their children not getting into good high schools or colleges, but we are usually well ahead of most of the rest of the country with our advantages and superior education. Just because kids are not being taught in classrooms, doesn't mean that their ability to learn disappears or declines. Even special needs students will continue to learn at their pace. I expect that when school starts again kids will be chomping at the bit to return to school and to dig deep into their learning.

Parents and students are also worried about the lack of face to face social interaction that they crave. Fortunately, we do have technology that can support social contact and interaction. I'm not saying that students should be playing video games all day, just as I have said in regular times. However, if they can connect remotely, talk, and play games together, that is good. Kid these days, can even learn to talk on the phone, instead of just texting!



be kind

In conclusion, I would just like to emphasize that it is crucial to be kind to each other and ourselves. Teachers are working very hard to be the best educators they can, so please don't pressure them if your child isn't understanding everything. Don't forget that some teachers are parenting their own young children, too. Parents are trying to be the best parents they can be with the sudden presences of their children home all day as they are also dealing with stresses of at-home work or even loss of income.

Take good care of yourselves, and particularly take good care of our kids – encourage them to learn, to ask questions, to contact teachers, but if they are feeling overwhelmed, give them a break. Provide structure, both for learning, but also for physical activity and family activities. Keeping them and ourselves busy with educational and fun activities can really help us all to avoid focusing on the virus and the uncertainty and anxiety that produces. We can together and individually get through this as stronger people – but remember, physical and mental health come first.

Thanks for considering my comments.

I am always available to discuss anything with you at agold@reedschools.org.