

True Education Involves Suffering

One of the best pieces of educational advice I've heard in recent months didn't come from a book or a talk about education. It came from a film about wine.

This past week I watched [*A Year in Burgundy*](#) on Netflix. I highly recommend this documentary not only for the information it provides on the winemaking process, but also for its purely aesthetic and meditative value.

I was particularly struck by something one of the winemakers said in the film, which was gleaned from his decades of experience with grapes:

"A vine has to suffer to make good grapes. You can't coddle it, or it will become lazy like a couch potato. He sits there and you feed him [then] he doesn't have to work. If the roots don't dig deep, there's trouble. They have to go down four or five meters. Then if it's dry for a couple of months, no problem; the vine will survive."

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As both parents and adults, our natural instinct is to prevent children from suffering as much as possible. In large part, I think this is because we know that children have a more difficult time understanding a greater purpose behind suffering.

This instinct to shield children from suffering inevitably finds its way into the realm of education. It takes many forms: the parent who ends up writing most of her child's paper; the teacher who desperately searches for new ways to make a lesson more entertaining; the reformers and legislators

who increasingly attempt to create an education system that produces good results irrespective of the student's will.

But education and suffering have always gone hand-in-hand. This is because it requires discipline—as exemplified in the fact that the Latin word for student is *discipulus*—which involves a constant fight against temptations toward sloth and distraction in order to maintain a routine of learning. Education also sometimes requires struggling with one math problem for two or three hours. It demands that we constantly seek after the most adequate way of expressing a concept in speech and writing. It means having to repeatedly endure the anxiety of wondering whether we have fully prepared for an exam.

And—perhaps in times past it was different, I don't know—in this day and age, becoming educated also means that you put in work above and beyond the demands of your teachers and the homework they assign.

If children are to become educated, they will necessarily have to endure much suffering. They may not perfectly understand why, but they will thank their parents and teachers for it later in life. For, as with wine, in the words of Aristotle, “The roots of education are bitter, but the fruits are sweet.”

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