

The twelve Rs

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I'm sure you have no problem with the importance of the "Three Rs" but a little reflection soon shows there are many more 'Essential Rs' that have been forgotten and left to chance. Simply ask yourself what Rs you'd want somebody who worked for you to possess.

Reading	Riting	Rithmetic	Relationships
Reviewing	Responsibility	Reflecting	Researching
Reporting	Reasoning	Remembering	Resolve

Are any of these non-essential?

Should any of these be left out of basic education?

Go and ask your local basic educator what they teach under these categories and how they assess results. Vague isn't it... .. Now go and have a cry in the corner or light a blue touch paper according to your nature.

Is it bad? Yes.

Is it serious? Yes.

Should something be done? Yes.

Can something be done? Let's hope so.

Getting a better grip

Well-meaning basic educators may consider that they currently attempt to develop some of these other Rs. The trouble is that this is haphazard and subordinated to the traditional, measurable and politically sensitive '3'. A good example of how the National Curriculum and government interference is asphyxiating education.

OK then, how should anyone with responsibility for education go about getting a grip on these as-yet undefined Rs?

- Most people can guess at what they are but an educator or examiner needs to be a little clearer. I've discussed each of them below which should clarify what they cover and why they're important.
- I don't want to specify teaching methods, simply the objectives, but one specific we ought to have is decent assessment methods for measuring results. These are naturally going to be varied and possibly quite subjective so this will be an important area requiring work. A class teacher might simply observe a pupil's determination and 'make a comment in the box provided', a recruitment questionnaire might ask what positions of responsibility a candidate has held, while reasoning could be tested by a formal examination.
- Starting at an early age looks like a good idea, but as I'm not an expert in child development I wouldn't like to say when to start and what would be a good introduction. Books for 6, 9, 12 and 15 year-olds would be very different; not only for

development reasons but also the important lifestyle aspects which are very relevant to some of the Rs.

- Judging by the controversies about the '3', competing schools of thought could develop. There is some danger of some of these Rs being hijacked by religion (Note : Religion is a non-essential R). The respectability of spending time on say "Reflection" shouldn't be a green light to religious meditation.

My conclusion is that experienced educators should be able to make a start after making some notes on the back of an envelope, but that some leadership will be required to support mainstream bulk education and develop a foundation of knowledge.

Twelve Rs described and discussed

In the following I've tried to emphasise the need for these Rs in everyday life. Although the '3' don't get much attention that's not to belittle their importance. Where I've ventured ways these subjects might be approached these are merely suggestions.

Reading and Riting

Gateways to knowledge and communication. Essential living skills. Fundamental to academic learning. Necessary for most employment.

Rithmetic

Supposedly mathematics is an essential living skill but in practice most people only deal with very simple sums ie. Arithmetic. A gateway to being able to apply simple mathematics to everyday situations and (for some) technical subjects.

Relationships

Managing relationships sensibly is an incredibly important living skill. Being able to make friends, stand up for ones self, take risks with people and knowing where to draw the line are survival skills. There are many shades between "I'm a victim - kick me" and "Do as I say - or I'll shoot". Why should we care for other people and how can we do it? How far do you have to look to see the effects of marriage breakdowns, dissolute and disaffected youth and loneliness at all ages causes?

At present relationships are learnt from the daily contorted confrontations - a comprehensive 'How not to' guide - presented by soap operas.

This subject has some inherent problems:

- Children are not teenagers, who in turn are not adults
- It is easy for random moral strictures to masquerade as essential behaviour.

Reviewing

This is a more adult skill which requires good comprehension, good background knowledge and critical examination. However the rudiments of "should I believe so and so" and sorting out the Goodies from the Baddies are something that needs to be started at an early age. Sports fans get plenty of opinions on the telly and newspapers but rarely have to work things out for themselves.

Reviewing is about analysing what others are saying and doing. It's an important life-skill because we use it to decide what we ourselves will do: For example a holiday brochure may paint a pretty picture but the small print contain nasty surprises. My friend Ian is mixing with a bad lot, and having fun, so he says. What should I do?

Reflection

A cousin of reviewing, this is more inward-looking and about examining the realities of a current situation and searching for opportunities over a period. If people don't have this important life-skill then two things happen: Firstly they drift without making a decision then possibly make a snap decision without any basis. Secondly they are likely to use 'template' decisions as learnt from soap operas(!) or be overly reliant on others who may not have their best interests at heart.

Responsibility

Lost to the point of vanishing! Does anybody have responsibility for teaching responsibility? Most people would accept that you need some moral framework to support responsibility. Perhaps there aren't enough teachers and parents who have a good enough grip on morality without religion to make much of this topic.

When I say to an employee "it is your duty to behave sensibly and not to operate unfamiliar equipment so as not to put yourself and others in danger" then I need to have confidence that the employee is properly committed to that obligation.

There are lots of "don'ts" here and not many opportunities to get a first-hand benefit. Therefore it is important when trying to encourage responsible behaviour to praise and reward it. It is necessary to give people graded opportunities to practice being responsible (and getting the praise). This starts with being allowed to go to the shops, then being entrusted with weightier matters. An inevitable consequence is that this involves taking risks. Message to schools and parents: You cannot develop people's sense of responsibility without taking the risk of trusting them.

Researching

'Going and finding out' is a life skill which is in danger of falling into disuse as the ever-present media never cease pushing information at people. Of course for any serious learning being able to use a library and the internet is a necessary skill, but in everyday life very basic things can make huge differences between choices people make. Can I get help with my travel costs? Which school will be most suitable for my child? How can I make a complaint and get my money back? and so on. I don't have to take a chance with the Yellow pages when there are local friends and acquaintances I can ask for personal recommendations.

Reporting

In a lot of cases Reporting is the same as literate recording, but the essence is being able to organise ideas according to some logic and then communicate them clearly. Invitations to a party or a 'lost cat advert' need to contain certain basic bits of information. From this elementary stage we can get to everyday activities such as letter writing, making a report in the accident book and applying for a job. These really ought to be within the capability of most people. Any responsible job will require taking notes

and completing written records. To participate in any voluntary organisation, do any professional job, progress from the very lowest clerical grade, or any except the most basic education requires the ability to write clear reports.

Reporting requires many of the other Rs and could be seen as another reason why Reading, Riting and Research are important. One of the troubles from a teacher's or parent's point of view is giving some sort of reward for what is often a chore. My only suggestion here is to ask the pupil to report on something they care about and want their peers to care about (ie my hobby makes me interesting) or has some cute novelty value (eg a poem.)

Reasoning

It seems strange to be saying that Reasoning is one of the 'lost Rs'. How is it that the main leg of 'Intelligence' doesn't get practised, rewarded or checked? There is a worrying trend for boys to consider 'intelligence' as an unnecessary and uncool attribute. This is reflected year after year when girls do better than boys at school.

Now with all the study of intelligence and reasoning it shouldn't be difficult to cobble together some programme, exercises and measuring methods; the problem is once again the poor rewards for braininess, both actual and through society's lack of respect and lack of role models. "Clever" means fooling the authorities not an opportunity to succeed.

Remembering

Having some sort of ability to retain information is obviously an important life-skill. Too often though people need to be told or shown something repeatedly before it registers and even then important details can be lost. For any non-robotic employment it's necessary to learn formally and informally, take instructions quickly and accurately and learn from experience. Obviously for any academic achievement and business or professional career quick store and recall is one of the basic requirements for success.

A huge amount of work has been done on understanding how people learn so it's a bit surprising to find so many who have to struggle to take instruction and lack accurate recall. I assume this is down to lack of practice and undirected teaching. Perhaps learning *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by heart is a bit extreme, but memory exercises do improve that faculty.

Resolve

This is a complex attitude to life driven mainly by an individual's experience and social expectation. There are aspects of leadership and motivation in there as well. Why is this essential? Everybody needs a bit otherwise they can't function normally. (Look at what happens in cases of depression.) At the basic level this is "make your mind up are you coming or not!". Continually unreliable or uncertain people exasperate then lose their friends and jobs. Unreliable ditherers can't be trusted.

Individuals who can make decisions and work to overcome obstacles are going to achieve much more than their easily discouraged counterparts. Employees who can be trusted to 'get on with things' are obviously better regarded and marked out for supervisory roles themselves than those who have to be constantly supervised.

Developing resolve can be done by intense social pressure as individuals struggle to keep up with the crowd but there's the danger that some may opt-out and do their own thing. Alternative methods all involve challenging exercises whether formal and organised or informal and private. The common factor is that somebody needs to know what the target is, keep an eye on progress, encourage when necessary and congratulate on achievement. My guess is that there aren't many 'natural' coaches but that a bit of guidance could encourage more to fill the role.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the 'forgotten Rs' are vitally important.

Also we can see that educationalists, parents and society have some thinking and re-orientation to square-up to the need to equip everyone in the country with these 'necessary Rs'.

One of the big challenges is to find ways to develop and assess these Rs without falling into the trap of a rigid curriculum. These are characteristics which should of course be universally encouraged but also depend of individual experiences which vary widely across age, background, social situations and other experience - There will never be a one-size-fits-all, production-line solution.

Postscript

I came to this because I was sketching out how I would assess applicants for a job. I kept being amazed by finding yet another 'forgotten R', how important it was and how little attention is paid in the education system to it. I hope, now we've got handy labels for these things, that an effort can be made to see that everyone gets a proper education for everyone's benefit.

Notes

- Respect is not one of these essential Rs because it's earned not learnt
- Reliability can included as part of Responsibility
- Relaxation is a worthy R as a life skill but doesn't rate highly as necessary for a employment.

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