

# TGIF Taking Great Ideas Forward

Improving Northern Capital - Sustainable Development in the Northern Tier

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and do not reflect positions of organizations with which he is affiliated.

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*“The human future can be sought nowhere else but within ourselves. What is needed is for all of us to learn how to stir up our dormant potential and use it from now on purposefully and intelligently.”*

-Aurelio Peccei-

## MEETINGS and EVENTS:

Links will provide additional information. Dates for recent additions are in **bold**.

<i>What</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Where</i>
<a href="#">Lake Superior Binational Forum</a>	May 11-12	All Day	Thunder Bay ON
BCEDC Board Meeting	May 14 <sup>th</sup>	10 AM - noon	TBA
<a href="#">Future of Farming</a> Statewide Conference	May 14 & 15	All Day	Madison, Monona Terrace
Stream Monitor Training**	May 19 <sup>th</sup>	All Day	Duluth – Lester Park
BCEDC Board Meeting	June 11 <sup>th</sup>	10 AM – noon	TBA
<a href="#">2007 Entrepreneur's Conference</a>	June. 12-13	All day	Milwaukee
<a href="#">Inland Sea Kaya Symposium</a>	June 14-17	All Day	Washburn WI
<a href="#">Midwest Renewable Energy Fair</a>	<b>June 15-17</b>	All Day	Amherst, WI
<a href="#">Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference &amp; Workshops</a>	June 21 & 22	All Day	Telemark Lodge, Cable
<a href="#">Pie &amp; Politics</a>	June 28 <sup>th</sup>	Evening	Big Top Chautauqua

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## INSTRUCTION & LEARNING

Learning is central to the processes of life and the quality of learning greatly influences the quality of life. That idea came to me recently while driving and thinking about education. I'm in Thunder Bay today meeting with the **Lake Superior Binational Forum**. The parallel language with the Forum's vision statement preamble (*Water is Life and the quality of water determines the quality of life.*) will not be lost to a few TGIF readers.

Education is a social response to this fundamental “learning” element of human life. Most human societies assemble a system for instruction to foster learning. No Child Left Behind is a response to perceptions that our US system isn't working very well. I'm still wondering if the response is appropriate, but some educators and pundits are pretty vocal about the shortcomings of NCLB.

“Learning” by other (non-human) life forms is not a function of an educational system. Certainly for a vast majority of living organisms, their behavior is a function of highly inherited tropisms and instincts that influence survival. Modification of survival-dependent behavior mostly awaits mutation. But capacity to change behavior in response to environmental stimulus carries great survival value. When ornithologists discover that Amazonian songbirds can alter their songs to mimic chainsaws and sirens, we should probably rip a page from our book of assumptions.

I have been increasingly drawn to thinking about the biological functions of learning. It just seems that without a framework for thinking about learning, instruction and education that recognizes the most fundamental, biological, foundations for learning, we will continue to fall short of dealing with our frustrations about how instruction too often fails to support learning. Figuring out how to integrate insights from neuroscience and accommodate individual differences in capacity to learn will continue to challenge our socially constructed systems for education.

For us, humans living in a rural environment and challenged by small schools with declining enrollments, the institutional aspects of education are well worthy of our questions and critical thinking. Education is a system responding to an imperative from our social environment. Schools are an outcome of this imperative creating a formality to education that generally does a decent job for our youth. The “school years” roughly age 5 -25 were until recently good for life. Skills, knowledge and attitudes formed during the school years provided a framework for individuals to both fit, thrive and contribute to society. Technology developed during the past century changed all of that. No longer is it possible for an individual to assume that school-based learning is sufficient. When we automatically link schooling with education, we deprive our thinking of alternatives.

Confining education to the school years and to the classrooms inherent in school design, teaching and administration limits the potential for real reform. Until we can break the link between schools, classrooms, instruction and learning we will likely miss opportunities for authenticity. The link is between our ears. The late **Bela Banathy**, who began looking at instructional systems as social phenomena in the 1970s, cited a conversation with a school superintendent who remarked: “If Rip Van Winkle would wake up today, the only place he would feel at home is the classroom.”

Take care and have a great weekend!

/BRUCE

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*In addition Bruce maintains the following affiliations:*

[Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation](#), (BCEDC) *Director*

[Inland Sea Society](#), (ISS) *Director*

[Lake Superior Binational Forum](#), (LSBF) *US Delegation Co-Chair*

[Raindrop Garden Gallery](#), (RGG) *Co-owner*

[IDEA Consortium LLC](#), *Owner*

[Chequamegon Institute, Inc.](#) *Initial Registered Agent*

[Coalition for Eco-Industrial Development](#), (CEID) *Work Group Member*

[Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board](#), (WIB) *Member*

*The encircled fractal triangle represents an integrated cluster of seven ideas – economics, ecology, equity, ethics, experience, education and energy – that may be considered a core for sustainability studies. Bruce is available to present illustrated lectures and facilitate discussions about Industrial Ecology, Sustainable Development and the Sustainability Revolution.*