

# Prof. Rex Li's Writings

**Category:** Psychology

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**Title:** Egan's Major Ideas (1997: 277 – 279)

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**Summary/ Abstract:** Egan condensed his ideas of *The Educated Mind* in three pages.

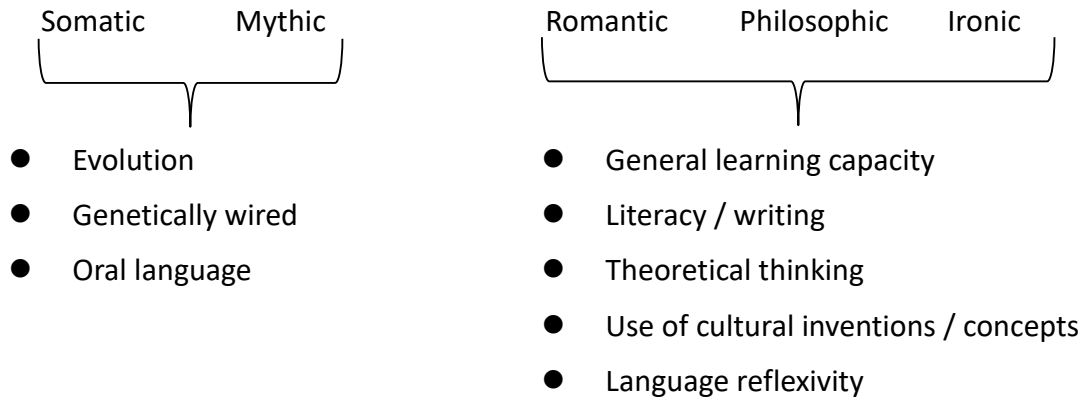
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Egan's Major Ideas (1997: 277 – 279)

(1) Summary in 5 kinds of understanding



standing that have developed in cultural history. We begin with the Somatic and Mythic kinds, whose basic forms are genetically programmed as a result of our evolutionary history; they come with the human body, in its senses and brain, and with the development of an oral language. Thereafter our general learning capacity comes increasingly into play, enabling us, more laboriously, to develop Romantic, Philosophic, and Ironic kinds of understanding by recapitulating the cultural inventions of literacy, theoretic thinking, and extreme linguistic reflexiveness.

p. 277

(2) Arguments of evolution – favoring development and success.

distant past and by cultural developments in the more recent past. There were clear advantages to early societies if their younger members learned language very quickly and used it to build workable images of the society and the cosmos—images to which they also developed strong emotional commitments. The reproductive success of such groups led to the uniqueness of human childhood in the animal world. An advantage also was to be gained in preserving throughout life, even if in diminishing degree as individuals aged, a relatively undifferentiated learning capacity. Such a capacity would allow a degree of adaptability and flexibility in learning the particular skills and lore required within the complex cultural societies that language created; these societies might be indeterminately varied, and the individual

p. 277

(3) Early learning sets template which underling future learning

images of their immediate society and of their cosmos. This early learning is rapid and typically so successful that it remains fixed throughout life, providing a template of presuppositions on which future learning is fitted. By

p. 278

R: Yes! Yes!



∴ (1) Successful learning in K – 12 should find its way back to somatic / mythic understanding (e.g. oral response, body movement, tactile, feelings, etc.)

**(4) Mismatch between evolution and culture**

Evolution favors  
Small non literate  
social groups in  
same ideology

Culture creates  
lots of concepts  
artifacts / values  
beyond biological evolution

Evolution has not equipped us ideally for the educational tasks required by advanced literate societies. We are equipped intellectually for the condition of small nonliterate social groups sharing unquestioned ideologies and images of the cosmos. Our preparation for such groups is only too evident

p. 278

**(5) Egan believes we have only some general learning capacity. We need a better education program**

through adulthood. We have to adapt our undifferentiated learning capacity to deal with much more complex and flexible learning than it has been evolutionarily shaped to handle. We cannot tinker with the “hardware” supplied to us by evolution, so we have to adapt the “software” of educational programs in order to subvert the natural constraints on our intellectual flexibility. The weak, undifferentiated learning capacity is not designed to disturb and reshape the early intellectual conditioning we experience. The challenge for education is to work out how we can nevertheless manage to do this.

p. 278