

Preface

*It's all a dream we dreamed
One afternoon long ago*
— Robert Hunter, *Box of Rain*

Our society is built on competition, so it follows that, to reinforce and program that behavior, our educational system is predicated on a competitive model. Hardly anyone can imagine sports, education, business, or politics without competition. From a young age we find that virtually every activity in which we participate includes some form of competition. Whether in school or sports, shortly after we start, we face an opponent in one form or another: When we're introduced to a little "friendly" competition almost immediately in sports. When we're graded on a curve, when we take the PSAT to prepare for the SAT, and even when we are asked to raise our hands if we know the answer, we are learning to compete against each other from day one. Few of us question this approach and obviously our parents don't. We tend to think of competition as natural and essential—people must compete to succeed, the logic goes, so they had better get used to the pressures of competition. The problem with this approach is not with competition per se, but how and when we go about having people compete. The current competitive system throws us into competition unprepared, and the results for most, are not optimal. Competition is an advanced aspect of any activity, not something for those who are unprepared. We've all been duped into believing that a competitive environment creates the best results for everyone.

In 1988, after a lifetime playing sports, including eighteen years of competing in the sport of tennis, and 14 years of teaching it, I realized that the fixation on winning was given too much importance in our society. The introduction of competition into the learning process before we learn *any* of the physical, mental, and emotional fundamental skills of the game, compromises all aspects of the learning process, thereby undermining our potential. Unfortunately, the premature introduction of competition is omnipresent in our culture. The negative side effects of premature competition shape and define nearly every aspect of modern life, including education, religion, politics, personal and international relations, sports, news, business, and most of popular culture.

I have been on a long journey seeking answers to deeper questions about humanity's place in the world, and the fundamental problems confronting our species and our world. After forty years of searching piece by piece for the answers, the puzzle coalesced. These fundamental societal problems arise and are passed on in the way we are educated. By introducing competition into every facet of our lives, we undermine everyone's ability to attain competence and eventually excellence, and thereby perpetuate the problems that hold us back and limit our future.

Evolutionary Education examines one of the core beliefs of our society. The first part of the book gives a brief synopsis of the history of human culture in light of competition, and illuminates the "dark side" of our competitive system. It examines the real and alleged benefits of this system to show that it does not live up to its hype, and in fact causes more harm than good. Even the small percentage of winners in the competitive system often pay a steep price, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, for their success. *Evolutionary Education* shows how the dominant competitive mindset, into which we are all indoctrinated, prevents us from questioning the validity of the competitive system, or recognizing and acknowledging its devastating side effects.

Evolutionary Education then offers an alternative, non-competitive/cooperative educational model, which is described in detail in the course of the book. Competition

takes its logical place in the learning process as an advanced aspect of any activity — an option, not a requirement. Something to be engaged in once competence in the fundamental skills can be demonstrated.

What I am proposing isn't theoretical, pie-in-the-sky conjecture. A viable, working program of *Evolutionary Education* is in place in my tennis program, *Effortless Tennis*. I've been teaching the highly competitive, fine motor coordination sport of tennis since 1974. This program has helped thousands of women, men, and children develop the skills and enjoy the sport of tennis. Since October of 1992, however, this program has been based on a non-competitive educational model. In other words, *there is no competition in the program while people are learning the mental, emotional, and physical fundamentals of how to play the game*. My research in the twenty-eight years since I removed competition from the program, which has included twenty thousand hours of on-court observation, of roughly a thousand different students, demonstrates that a non-competitive learning system can lead to tremendous success — even in competition, if that is so desired. Yet, that is not the goal of the program. *Evolutionary Education* sets us on the path to a more satisfying, more productive, cooperative, less stressful, and enjoyable future.

The last part of the book shows how this non-competitive learning system can be applied in every area of our lives, and how it can help our species evolve to higher levels of consciousness. *Evolutionary Education* is a map and an invitation to join in a most important task — moving past our aggressive, competitive nature, whose dark side has led to inequality, poverty, injustice, abuse, war, and widespread mediocrity and malaise, toward a new era of cooperation, innovation, excellence, peace, and joy. Reading this book will encourage you to search out your piece of the puzzle in the next stage of our human evolution. It will help you develop greater skill, excellence, and enjoyment in your chosen field of endeavor, and, will make you happier, healthier, and more fulfilled, while making your world a better, more humane place to live, work, and play.

Brent Zeller
Summer 2020
Marin County, California