

## Something Borrowed, Something Blue: Drucker and Education 2.0

Picture an orchestra in traditional Japanese clothing and a mongoose mascot playing a toy melodica to the tune of the iconic clarinet glissando of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. This is a scene from *Nodame Cantabile*,<sup>1</sup> a Japanese anime and live-action drama, originally a *manga*<sup>2</sup> series about classical musicians, Nodame and Chiaki. The mongoose scene is one of those whimsical oddities of exported entertainment that I fondly remember as a high school student in the Philippines, which I carried over into my eclectic playlists in adulthood.

### Management lessons from Japanese anime

Nodame is a talented student from a middle-class family with a flair for adding her own haphazard song-like style to her piano playing while Chiaki is an aspiring conductor with generational wealth who often appears cold and pragmatic. Their different circumstances have ultimately created a conflict in the way they interpret music—one being structured the other being more free-spirited.

Perhaps what drew me to *Nodame Cantabile* is its personal development theme. Nodame's backstory emphasizes the importance of accessible and purposeful mentorship. If she had an excellent piano teacher in her early childhood who recognized her strengths, she would have gained confidence to take on higher aspirations. Later on, she takes matters into her own hands and applies to a music school in Paris.

On the other hand, Chiaki's dream to become a conductor despite his violinist background is a lesson on management.

Peter Drucker, often regarded as the father of modern management, wrote about managing oneself and how to become an effective executive. In Vienna, he had a rich musical education. He would often go to the opera where he was enamored with Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff*. He highlighted the importance of focusing on one's strengths to become an effective worker<sup>3</sup> and the ceaseless pursuit of perfection as Verdi did.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on excellence is analogous to how classical music training underscores the importance of meticulous performance.

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<sup>1</sup> This was adapted into a Japanese live action drama, a 3-season animated series, and another Korean drama adaptation. The 23 volumes of the manga were also officially published in English by Del Rey Manga. It was adapted into a live-action drama and an animated series which were both widely distributed in television channels across Asia.

<sup>2</sup> Manga are comics from Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Harvard Business Review Classics: Managing Oneself* (Massachusetts, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2008), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Peter F. Drucker and Isao Nakauchi, *Drucker on Asia: A dialogue between Peter Drucker and Isao Nakauchi* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 103.

Like Gershwin and other composers featured in *Nodame Cantabile*, Drucker was also featured in an anime.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, Drucker had an interesting relationship with Japan. In *Drucker on Asia*, Isao Nakauchi, a Japanese business tycoon, asked him how Japan can reinvent its workforce.<sup>6</sup> He shared his experience working in a bank in London as an economist and executive secretary. He was an excellent analyst but the senior partner berated him and asked, “What should you be doing now to be effective in your new job?”<sup>7</sup>

In Chiaki’s case, he struggled to think through what being a conductor requires. He is a good violinist but struggled with managing an orchestra. It requires a different skillset.

At the center of this emphasis on self-reflection, Drucker zeroed in on taking charge of one’s own development.<sup>8</sup> To promote this mindset among students, education should be human-resource-development-oriented as much as it is teaching-focused. The teacher is a manager who identifies the student’s strengths and collaboratively creates a roadmap to achievement. It can only be achieved if our educational system is deliberately structured to guide students towards self-driven achievement.

### **Drucker’s leitmotif: From Kierkegaard to social ecology**

The tension in *Nodame Cantabile* is one between established structure and artistic innovation. I believe *Rhapsody in Blue* is a deliberate choice to allude to the harmony of the old and the new. It combined classical music structure and jazz rhythms with an infectious vitality that cemented its status as a celebrated piece. Similarly, Drucker’s professional timeline has a leitmotif—the “tension between continuity and change.”<sup>9</sup>

To have a myopic view of Drucker’s body of work, one that is devoid of its historical context and philosophical underpinnings, is a disservice to the breadth and depth of his genius. It is important to contextualize the overarching theme of his work: the individual in society—human dignity and the role of organizations in the development of individuals.<sup>10</sup>

One of his earlier writings focused on the philosophy of the human individual, particularly Søren Kierkegaard’s *despair*, which is a product of the tension between existing as an individual and as a member of society.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard advocated for a “leap of faith,” a concept which later on became instrumental to Drucker’s work in which he outlined the origins of totalitarianism to the crisis of faith on the prevailing economic ideologies.<sup>12</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> His seminal work on management is a key element of the anime adaptation of the novel *Moshi Kōkō Yakyū no Joshi Manager ga Drucker no "Management" o Yondara* (“What If the Female Manager of a High School Baseball Team Read Drucker’s “Management”).

<sup>6</sup> Drucker and Nakauchi, *Drucker on Asia*, 95-97.

<sup>7</sup> Drucker and Nakauchi, *Drucker on Asia*, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Drucker and Nakauchi, *Drucker on Asia*, 111-12.

<sup>9</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Ecological Vision, Reflections on the American Condition* (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 2011), 442.

<sup>10</sup> Drucker, *The Ecological Vision*, 450

<sup>11</sup> Drucker, *The Ecological Vision*, 434-35.

<sup>12</sup> Karen E. Linkletter and Joseph A. Maciariello, “Genealogy of a social ecologist,” *Journal of Management History* 15, no. 4 (2009): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17511340910987284>.

faith in the wrong ideology led to the eventual collapse of society which formed the backdrop of Drucker's early professional life.

Continuity of society defined the progression of Drucker's work. He proposed a "new society," and central to it is a secular solution to *despair*: a rationally-managed society of organizations championing freedom and human dignity.<sup>13</sup> Drucker's vision of a modern organization is "*a thriving and sustainable democracy*" where workers "*have a purpose beyond subsistence.*"<sup>14</sup>

Drucker viewed management from a "social ecology" perspective where each sector is an organ crucial to maintain systemic equilibrium. It is inevitable that society and by extension, education, will evolve to accommodate the values of modern society. Like people and processes, changes can be managed. By evaluating which changes do not fit the current paradigm and determining the opportunities these changes offer, Drucker saw the emergence of knowledge as the main resource of modern work.

### **The knowledge worker is an independent learner**

Like Nodame and Chiaki, I am about to move on to a different kind of environment. As of writing, I am on the final leg of classroom didactics for my Doctor of Medicine (MD) degree. After I take a few more examinations, I will be able to proceed to clerkship—a 12-month clinical rotation in various specialties.

In the Philippines, the MD degree is postgraduate degree. It is typical for premeds to take health-allied majors to gain relatively better clinical exposure than their peers from other fields. I am an odd case as I majored in communications and management and have previously worked in human resources and media planning.

Given my unconventional background, I have had this sinking feeling of inadequacy as I try to think through what I need to do to survive clerkship. Nonetheless, it has been a whirlwind romance; I was enamored by the novelty but was ultimately disillusioned with the system as I progressed.

In the first three years of school, I was trained to process an overwhelming amount of seemingly disparate information siloed into separate courses (e.g., anatomy, biochemistry, etc.). This is essential as building a good knowledge base is necessary for a knowledge worker like a physician. To become a good physician, I have to learn how to sift through information and to determine what is clinically relevant.

Eventually my cumulative fund of knowledge gained through studying and clinical exposure will help me create and continuously improve my mental models such as illness scripts which may guide my diagnostic approach and management.

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<sup>13</sup> Linkletter and Maciariello, "Genealogy of a social ecologist," 340.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Haas Edersheim, *The Definitive Drucker* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2007), 157.

I tend to have divergent views on how medical knowledge may be taught. Part of my skepticism with the current system stems from the disjointed presentation of medical concepts that creates an illusion of compartmentalization of knowledge through divisions of topics into subjects.

In reality, medical knowledge forms webs of interrelated concepts. Learning becomes more intuitive and useful when it is integrated across basic and clinical sciences from anatomy, pathophysiology, to medical or surgical management. When it is digested as a whole story and approached through a problem-based learning, clinical cases become easier to understand and application of knowledge leads to better retention.

A lot of the information I learned so far have been new to me while my peers with health-allied backgrounds somehow breezed through most of the basic sciences. Hence, I prefer going at my own pace by reading or listening to a pre-recorded material of my own choice to get acquainted with the concepts in a non-intimidating way. When I feel confident enough, this is when I try going through the materials provided by the school. Perhaps this ability to independently learn and take charge of my own education is what kept me sane throughout this experience.

What I now realize after three years in medical school is there is one skill that I believe has been instrumental to being an effective knowledge worker. It is the ability to quickly and intuitively learn new technology and use these tools to further my learning and improve my work. In every job I had, I had to learn how to use new applications needed to process data or optimize processes and teach others how to use it. Similarly, in medical school I continue to use numerous applications to aid in my learning or research outputs. Independent learning is essential to honing this skill.

With the rise of artificial intelligence tools, there has been some uncertainty on how it will affect education. I believe students should not be banned from using these tools. Instead, our educational system must be able to adapt to harness its potential for enabling better learning and to promote its responsible use.

Educational tools that help students have existed for several years. In 2013, I was able to use Khan Academy, a website with free educational videos delivered in an engaging way, to study for my college admission exams. In the same year, a senior introduced me to Wolfram Alpha, an AI-enabled solver and explainer that can answer any factually-based query including mathematical problems. Before that, I was already using Microsoft Encarta Math in high school to help me logically think through math equations step-by-step.

These tools were groundbreaking in their own right but given the pervasive digital divide and the situational context of that time, none of these were popular in the Philippines. Likewise, these were not able to massively disrupt education the way ChatGPT and language learning models (LLM) continue to do today.

Eventually, new technologies experienced a steep rise in adoption in the Philippine educational space as internet penetration increased and mobile phones became more affordable for the vast majority. Technology ushered a significant paradigm shift in

education after COVID-19. The pandemic normalized online learning modalities and promoted the use of various tools. From this, we see the constant tension between continuity and change. Future knowledge workers must learn how to quickly adapt to new challenges and preserve continuity.

### **The teacher, the pedagogue, and the new classroom**

To reimagine education 2.0, we must go back to the role of the teacher in the classroom. Education used to be accessible only among the elite and one-on-one instruction was the norm. Later on, the industrialized society saw a shift towards mass-instruction through the classroom. At present, I believe we need to return the focus to personalized learning.

Drucker's early education in Vienna was considered avant-garde during that time period.<sup>15</sup> He fondly recounted stories of his two school teachers, Miss Sophy and Miss Elsa. He described Miss Sophy as a charismatic teacher who can teach arts and crafts non-verbally, and Miss Elsa as a methodical pedagogue who staunchly advocated for his goal-directed improvement.<sup>16</sup> The latter "*knows how to program learning in the student.*"<sup>17</sup> Drucker explained that a teacher is born with a gift and can become even greater with the methods of a pedagogue who works with the individual to ensure learning and improvement through individualized goal-setting.<sup>18</sup>

Like Miss Sophy, Sal Khan, the founder of Khan Academy, is a gifted teacher; he can make any motivated learner understand a complex concept with ease. However, asynchronous instruction through videos do not allow for personal interaction between the student and the teacher. I believe that lively classroom discourse was instrumental in my development during my formative years as a liberal arts student in university.

At the height of the pandemic, my first year medical school lectures were primarily delivered in asynchronously through pre-recorded videos. I am not new to this way of learning. I used to take free massive open online courses (MOOCs) on the side when I was in college and have also used it alongside Khan Academy. Admittedly, I am in favor of this format for initial learning as it helps me learn at my own pace.

When restrictions were lifted, we were finally able to do necessary in-person instruction for history taking and physical examination through simulated patient cases. Last year, our medical school decided to scrap the hybrid model utilizing both in-person instruction and videos, in favor the return to mandatory 8 am to 5pm in-person lectures for a 300-person class. This was met with resistance from the student body citing that the lack

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<sup>15</sup> Sebastian Eschenbach, "From inspired teaching to effective knowledge work and back again: n: A report on Peter Drucker's schoolmistress and what she can teach us about the management and education of knowledge workers," *Management Decision* 48, no. 4: 475-78, <http://doi.org/10.1108/00251741011041292>.

<sup>16</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Adventures of a Bystander* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1994), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Drucker, *Adventures of a Bystander*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Drucker, *Adventures of a Bystander*, 78-80.

of self-paced instruction has been detrimental to the average student. The administration insisted on shifting to in-person lectures for better learning outcomes. Once again, it was a battle between continuity and change.

The video format has its own failings. Some lecturers might be more comfortable teaching live with the ability to ask students questions as they teach concepts. There is the obvious lack of interaction between the lecturer and students that solidifies critical thinking. But this interaction is also limited in a large lecture hall. With limited time, not all students will be able to participate in a collective discussion. Hence, small group discussions for case-based learning are often used in medical school. Therefore, in a video-first medical education, the physician-educator's time is primarily spent not on traditional lecturing but on being a pedagogue, the students' guide in dissecting a case to enhance the integration of basic sciences and clinical knowledge.

If we dismiss the video lecture format as simply ineffective, we also miss out on learning innovations that are inclusive for everyone. For videos to become effective tools for initial knowledge acquisition, the gift of a charismatic teacher is important. Deliberate production of high-quality graphics delivered by an effective lecturer is required.

Medical education is also an interesting case as it has shaped a flourishing million-dollar industry out of this need for quality instruction. There are numerous companies selling paid subscriptions for videos intended for medical licensing exam review but are increasingly used by medical students around the world as primary materials to efficiently learn lecture content. These include the whiteboard-style instruction videos to cartoon-based memorization videos. The problem with these resources is that legal access is limited to those with financial resources and the vast majority of the developing world is excluded because of its pricing model.

On the other hand, the problem of interaction may potentially be addressed by AI. For example, Khan Academy has integrated in its system a personal AI tutor in the form of a chat feature. This provides students with interleaved critical thinking challenges between lessons and a virtual pedagogue that can answer questions and provide feedback in seconds.

While the likes of Khan Academy have worked towards a feasible system with its huge funding from the private sector, the same cannot be said for the public educational system, especially in a developing country like the Philippines.

With this problem of accessibility and the rise of online spaces for education, the role of wider ecosystem of learning becomes more central. Publicly-funded libraries and other communal spaces are integral to learning and education. These may help bridge the accessibility gap.

It is evident that the new classroom requires capital, political will, and the participation of the social sector to become truly inclusive.

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The traditional classroom continues to persist but as technology exponentially improves, may we strive towards an effective, inclusive, and scalable classroom that is geared towards individualized learning and achievement. The next education must be grounded on the human-centered liberal arts perspective, enabled by technology, refocused towards the methods of the pedagogue, and enriched by the wider ecosystem of learning.

Perhaps like *Rhapsody in Blue*, we can meld something old with something new, and something borrowed with something blue. Education 2.0 would then be a marriage of continuity and change.