

It all starts with a good teacher

Since they were first awarded in 1901, the Nobel Prizes have been used to promote the cause of world peace, to celebrate creativity, to note advancement, and to recognize discoveries and inventions in ways that engage imaginations and conversations across the world. The Nobel's honour individuals and groups (especially in the case of the Peace Prize) who have made major contributions to a range of human endeavors.

Looking at the biographies of Nobel Laureates from 1901, all of which are published on the Nobel.Se website, a repeated theme is that many were inspired by an outstanding teacher during their school and university years. A great teacher engages curiosity and the imagination and opens out areas of in depth understanding that are not part of the everyday discussion in society. The challenge of intellectual discipline and inquiry provides a basis that is enduring and life enhancing I know that my personal success, and in some aspect my own Nobel Prize came from that sound basic education provided by the teachers and lecturers in a public school and the state University of Queensland in Australia.

As a research investigator, I have been privileged to engage young minds in the joy of science. The thought that some young person who has worked with me will make a major discovery that opens out our understanding in ways that are of real human benefit is especially gratifying. Nobody sets out to win a Nobel Prize, but that can happen and, in any case, the real reward is making a real breakthrough that in some sense enhances understanding and the human reality

Starting with governments, we need a political focus on the power and potential of the young brains around us. The real capital of any nation is in its people, especially its bright young people.

Over the past decade or more, many governments around the world have implemented austerity measures leading to the loss of teachers and denying children the opportunity they deserve. This is highly counterproductive. The answer to a more sustainably prosperous future lies in greater and more targeted investment in education at all levels. Every student needs to be given the best opportunity to reach his or her full potential. We need great teachers, well-resourced schools and a conviction that education is the path to a prosperous and fulfilling future.

So here is something else to note and celebrate – something Nobel winners have basically in common that is regrettably lacking for far too many millions of children around the world today; the ability to learn from high quality teachers, to have the tools and resources to learn and a supportive environment in which to learn.

In the days to come, we celebrate winners of the Nobel Prizes. We should do that by pledging our support to both the idea and the reality of a great school for every child.

Nothing is more important for a peaceful and equitable human future.



Peter C. Doherty PhD, FRS
Nobel Laureate