“Well, Duh!” – 10 Obvious Truths That We Shouldn’t Be Ignoring
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The field of education bubbles over with controversies. It’s not unusual for intelligent people of good will to disagree passionately about what should happen in schools. But there are certain aspects of public education that are so problematic that even relatively moderate people agree they are fundamentally flawed.

1. Much of the material students are required to memorize is soon forgotten

The truth of this statement will be conceded (either unwillingly or perhaps half-reluctantly) by most people, who are already aware of it. But in my experience, many teachers continue to believe that simply having students read or listen to information—repetitively, at least a dozen times—will make it stick.

2. Just knowing a fact or skill isn’t good enough

Some students do manage to remember some of the material they were taught, but not necessarily because they understand it. Understanding takes time, practice, and, as often happens, it may not come until they have become adults.

3. Students are more likely to learn the things they feel known and cared about

I realize people whose impulse is to sneer at talk about how to teach kids, and who dismiss an “soft” or “fuzzy” anything other than traditional, routinized instruction of academic skills. But even here hard-liners, when pressed, are quick to acknowledge that the relationship between feeling and thinking, between a child’s comfort level and his or her capacity to learn, here, too, are loads of supporting data. As one group of researchers put it, “If you want students to perform well, you have to engage them in meaningful learning experiences.”

4. Students learn best when they feel known and cared about

Even mainstream education groups have embraced the idea of teaching the “whole child.” It’s a safe position, really, because just about every parent or educator will tell you that we should be supporting children’s physical, emotional, social, and artistic growth as well as academic.

5. Students learn best when they feel known and cared about

If we took seriously the need for kids to feel known and cared about, our discussions about the distinguishing features of a “good school” would sound very different. Likewise, our view of discipline and classroom management would be turned upside-down, seeing as how we no longer need to demand order and obedience, often with the result that kids feel less cared about—or even bullied—by adults.

6. Students learn best when they feel known and cared about

We want children to feel known and cared about and develop into thinking citizens with the skill to apply them in inventive and persuasive ways to real-life problems. If we all agree that a given principle is true, then why in the world do our schools still function as if it weren’t?

7. We want children to feel known and cared about

The obvious premise that we should respect what makes children children can be amended to include a related principle that is less obvious to some people: Learning something earlier isn’t necessarily better. Even if you take away all the other reasons to let kids learn at their own pace, you still have this one: children can’t express their ideas well until they have had enough time to develop their thinking skills.

8. Just because a lesson (or book, or class, or test) is harder doesn’t mean it’s better

“Thinking skills tend to be driven out of the curriculum by ever-growing demands for teaching larger and larger bodies of knowledge,” she laments. This is especially true in elementary or middle school environments in which kids get to make decisions about what they’re doing, effective, all else being equal. Yet such learning environments continue to be vastly overvalued by those kids spend most of their time during just following directions.

9. Kids aren’t just short adults

While many such statements are banal, some are crucial, and others are so obvious that it’s surprising we don’t learn them in school. For example, the student’s perspective is worth attending to in its own right. We know this, yet we continue to worship at the altar of “rigor.” I’ve seen lessons that aren’t unduly challenging yet are deeply engaging and intellectually valuable. Conversely, I’ve seen some students who have been isolated from the real world, but who have been overachieving on tests in school. Yet, the learning they have experienced has been isolated from the natural order of things. The content is often a hit or a miss, but rarely a hit!

10. Teachers have a lot more freedom than most people think

Because teachers have more freedom than most people think, we often do the most extraordinary things with that freedom. If we all agree that a given principle is true, then why in the world do our schools still function as if it weren’t?

The more closely we inspect this model of teaching and testing, the more problematic it reveals itself to be. First, there’s the question of tests.

Professional Learning Communities

John Hattie

The logic here is that we have to prepare you for the bad things that are going to happen to you. This is the same reason that we do not care if you have a heartache or a cold because we have to prepare you for the bad things that are going to happen to you. This is the same reason that we do not care if you have a heartache or a cold because we have to prepare you for the bad things that are going to happen to you.

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If we acknowledge that academics is just one facet of a good education, why do so few conversations about improving our schools deal with — and why are so few resources devoted to — non-academic issues? And why do we assign kids an unlearning task after the time? We’ve heard that children don’t learn a new skill unless they have been asked to do it. Now combine this point with the preceding one: If choice is related to interest, and interest is related to achievement, then it’s not much of a stretch to suggest that the learning environments in which kids get to make decisions about what they’re doing are effective, all else being equal.

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