Why Students Lose When Tougher Standards Win: A Conversation with Alfie Kohn
people are often kind enough to challenge my thinking. If

us some busywork to do, I thought I might as well call

or to tell her, "Because I said so." But my wife and I

really going on in schools, to see whether there's any

settings and for different ages, but roughly speaking,

another—what they're going to explore and how and when

participation in deciding—not just alone, but with one

teacher's judgment is reasonable and that, in the face

right, it also meets the needs of parents and citizens

The result isn't a deeper understanding of ideas or a

accountability movement is squeezing the life out of

broad guidelines of intellectual competence are more

in learning.

students deserve the chance to do meaningful problem

real responsiveness

expected detours. In one math class I visited, for

broad guidelines of intellectual competence are more

are terrific—as long as they're not just shoved down

daily, are having more and more homework piled on them.

A lot of horrible practices are justified in the name

mindless, macho talk about "raising the bar" in which

discrete phonics skills to all kids, even to the

truth to the conservative claim that a monolithic

socially or ethically the way they could be, just as

of hundreds of detailed items, facts, and subskills

driven backward by demands for Tougher Standards.

Larry Cuban. But notice its significance. If

majority who could learn in other ways. In short,

high school, continue to use textbooks. Most kids

future, that a lot more kids learn better by doing

cooperative learning, or a hands-on lesson, that was

insisted that all kids don't necessarily learn best

are terrific—as long as they're not just shoved down

things like control in the classroom, and the disciplines, American schools are

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quality learning until I got to college.

right, although I would add that a teacher-

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Beyond Discipline

that the Tougher Standards and

thoughtful, collaborative, and learner-centered provide the

distinguishes one kid from another. It doesn't

demanded that you just go out and do something than by listening, by having some choice

the opportunity to reflect on what they've done

are the opposite of responsive to individual
differences.

The kind of teaching that responds to different

What do you see when you visit classrooms where

proficiency tests.

literacy, or even standardized tests. They've been in the

of hundreds of detailed items, facts, and subskills

students. You've been quite critical of traditional classrooms.

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