“Well, Duh!” — 10 Obvious Truths That We Shouldn’t Be Ignoring
The field of education builds on controversies over its purposes. It’s not unusual for intelligent people of good will to disagree passionately about what school should be. But there are certain principles that aren’t debatable, that just about anyone would have to agree are true.

While many such statements are banal, some are important to note in the context of what we recommend to those who follow from them. It’s both intellectually interesting and practically useful to explore such contradictions: If we all agree that a given principle is true, then why is there so much confusion in our schools and why do they fail so often?

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

The truth of this statement will be conceded (either unwillingly or with a shrug) by just about any observer. Yet most teachers keep trying to make it stick, using every spurious method of “engagement” and “involvement” possible. And what’s worse, most educational leaders seem to think that if students find a task less than enjoyable, they should be rewarded with the stimulus of being allowed to play a video game for half an hour or to do some kind of computer-assisted task.

This essay is an abridged version of the introduction to Feel-Bad Education. The essay is reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston. Copyright © 2011 by Alfie Kohn.