<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>as they say in arkansas</td>
<td>Brennan Dignan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>remaking professional development</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>honoring the truth</td>
<td>Traci Nicole Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>a progressive response to “ed reform’s lost decade”</td>
<td>Nick Covington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>loving care</td>
<td>Brennan Dignan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>revisiting disobedience instruction as classroom structural change</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>review: an indigenous peoples’ history of the united states</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>review: the labor of lunch</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>review: the case for constructivist classrooms</td>
<td>Nick Covington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>review: the end of homework</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>new release: the human-centric primer</td>
<td>Chris McNutt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

restore humanity is brought to you by our Patreon supporters (as of February, 2020):

**proponents**
Bradley Hinson, Brandon Peters, Carolyn Wiezorek, Connie Fletcher, Debra Covington, Dustin Rideout, Dylan Wince, Jenny Lucas, Jeremiah Henderson, Monte Syrie, Rachel Lawrence, Ray O’Brien, Simeon Frang, Skylar L. Primm, Shannon Oliveira, Tim Fawkes, Traci Smith

**supporters**
Bill Rider, Burton Hable, Deanna Lough, Erin Dowd, “Harry”, Joshua Sloat, Mary Walls, Michael Hyde, Nadine Ley, Paul Wann, Shannon Shrader, Sheila N., Steve Peterson, Trent M. Kirkpatrick, Trevor Christian

**patrons**
Erin Gaudet, Katie Halford, Lisa Biber, Paul Kim, Susanne Michelle Harrison, Victoria Rydberg-Nania
I was attending an educational conference in Bangkok this past month and found myself in a particularly frustrating session. It was titled, “Happy and Healthy vs Shame and Perfection: Supporting Students Who Have a Desire to be Perfect and Succeed in Rigorous Environments.” This session was led by a very passionate and engaging social-emotional counselor who is working at a private, high pressure international school in Asia. The crowd seemed genuine in their motivation and the speaker seemed to be doing good work for a bunch of stressed out youngsters. However, something didn’t feel quite right to me. It was in the middle of this sessions that my wife’s beautifully articulate Arkansan colloquialism came to mind:

“If you have to eat a turd, you don’t nibble around the edges.”

Let me try to explain.

The presupposition in which we were entering this conversation wasn’t, or isn’t, ever vocalized or questioned. Deeply embedded and out of site, it operates in the shadows pointing its big fat finger at the student. I would express it somewhat imperfectly like this: the system is fine, deal with it.

How did the student come to “Have a Desire to be Perfect and Succeed”? Without asking that question, we enter into this conversation complicit in the unspoken answer: the students have done it to themselves. By extension then, our job as educators within the system is to help them develop strategies to overcome their self-generated problems. At these types of conferences we develop strategies that may help students to provide temporary relief (which is important), but cohort after cohort follow, each just a little bit worse off than the the one before, without any systemic overhaul. And so new conferences are developed, sessions offered, and strategies deployed, but of course it’s not a strategy problem: strategy is just a nibble.

Strategy As Nibble
Hong Kong had a particularly bad run of student suicides from 2015–2017. So much so that there is now a Wikipedia entry addressing that time period. You’ll also find this is true of South Korea. Lest you think it’s a problem with Asia, please refer to my “Cult of What” blog post and scroll down to “Re-Defining Winners and Losers.”
In that post I point to the sad irony that the “top” high schools, as we anoint them in the US, also have the unfortunate side effect of producing significant mental health problems. In fact, I think that it’s fair to say that wherever you find this version of the high stakes, compliance driven model, you’ll find correlative mental health issues.

In Hong Kong, a social-service organization conducted interviews of 7,500 students in the school system. They concluded that 51% were experiencing some form of depression and high degrees of stress. So they asked the students where it was coming from.

Most of the students said the main sources of their stress included the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education examination, the schoolwork and their apprehension about the future.

The HKDSE is an end of secondary school examination that basically dictates your post-graduation options and is modeled after the British system. It’s the epitome of a “one-shot” high stakes test. The “schoolwork” is a result of trying to get them to do well on the HKDSE. And of course, apprehension about the future is code for, “my ability to be accepted to one of the 12 universities given the gold star of approval by my community.”

So what was the response?
To address the issue, since the school year 2016/17, the Food and Health Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Hospital Authority and the Social Welfare Department jointly launched the “Student Mental Health Support Scheme” on a pilot basis.

Under the program, multi-disciplinary professional teams made up of teachers, educational psychologists, school social workers and psychiatric nurses would provide support for students with mental health issues.

Roughly 4 months after the rollout, only about 120 students had chosen to participate, and to my knowledge, this particular strategy is no longer being deployed. It’s a classic example of a technical approach to an adaptive problem.

So let me take a moment to summarize. The adults asked the students what was causing so much depression and stress. The students responded by telling them it was the HKDSE, schoolwork, and the future. So the adults responded with a nibble. “It’s not us it’s you” they said. “Here’s a mental health team to try and fix you”. That’s like providing a team of support to a kid who’s been told to hold on to an electric fence. “Hang tight little Jimmy, remember what we learned about grit and growth mindset?”

Another article explains how unreasonably demanding the academic culture has become and the fallout from this toxic culture.

Students in Primary 4 and above spend at least 55 hours a week on school, private tutoring and homework.

Between the competing claims of study, extracurricular activities and digital devices, students are getting at least one hour less sleep per night than international standards recommend, and Legco (the legislative council) warned that this may adversely affect physical and mental health.

The response?
Hong Kong schools are also beginning to recognise the value of mindfulness-based programmes. “What we’re seeing in schools is an acceptance that social and emotional learning is an important part of the curriculum from day one,” says Wolf.

I am actually a huge fan of mindfulness and the idea of promoting self-awareness and social-emotional literacy/learning in the classroom. There is so much in this article that I resonate with, but not once is the system put into
question. In fact, they are using improved academics as a way to justify the mindfulness program.

**Given Hong Kong’s focus on academics, there are parents who might baulk at this approach.** “But academics, performance and well-being are so interlinked,” says Justin McLaughlin, nurse and counsellor at Kellett School, the British International School in Hong Kong. “If your well-being is not in a good place, your academics are going to suffer and vice versa.”

I would actually challenge that view. I’ve seen plenty of students excel academically that were completely spun out emotionally. The larger point for me though is this: we can use meditation and mindfulness as a way to help alleviate the unfortunate fallout from this insane approach to education, we can sell it to parents because it should improve grades (a huge contributor to the stress in the first place), but we can’t propose that the entire system might be responsible for the student’s “well-being” not be in a “good place”? The system is fine, the student is not. Stress, depression, suicidal ideation, etc., originate from within the individual, as if the student was inevitably doomed by genetics or some other physiological, materialistic, or Darwinian shortcoming. “Poor little Jimmy, he just couldn’t take the pressure. However, little Suzie did and now she’s at Princeton.”

**I would like to propose three big bites and a swallow.**

1. **All high schools worldwide abandon grades and use feedback as a basis for their assessments while also eliminating any high stakes, “one-shot” testing paradigm that has the appearance of keeping someone from leading a meaningful life.**

2. **Any university or college that is ranked in the top 100 of the US News and World Report rankings, refuse to participate in those, or any other, rankings. Consider it collegiate civil disobedience. If the bigs disobey, the others will follow.**

3. **All university and colleges worldwide quit using standardized tests in their admission criteria. No APs, SATs, ACTs, HKSDEs, GCEs, IBs, etc. It will force each institution to have to truly create a holistic review process that sees students as the complex, multi-dimensional beings that they are as well as acknowledging that we now live in the 21st century where rote memorization and regurgitation are no longer relevant.**

And then we’re going to have to collectively hold our noses and swallow because it’s not going to taste good. All hell will break loose and everyone is going to lose their bearings. Eventually though, something else will emerge, and whatever that is couldn’t possibly be worse than what we have now, right?
Professional development in education is defective and I think almost everyone knows it. Instead of promoting pedagogy that builds on the inner motivation, purpose, and desires of our students, PD tends to promote fads, one-and-done workshops, and the latest district initiative that fails to make any long-lasting change. It’s difficult to find an unbiased account of PD spending, but The New Teacher Project reports that the large districts in their study spent $18,000 average per teacher on PD. Just imagine if even a fraction of that money went to teacher stipends, salaries, or just general classroom improvements!

And for teachers seeking conferences in 2020, costs are high:

- SXSW Edu: $485
- ASCD: $725 (non-member)
- Deeper Learning: $800
- Learning Solutions: $1,895 (non-member)
- ISTE: $550 (non-member)

None of these costs include room and board, and only a few compensate all meals. For the average teacher — especially for those in small or poorly funded districts — these costs are unreasonable. Even more egregious, many of these conferences do not compensate presenters (ISTE is a whopping $100 less at $450 if you choose to present.) For conferences that provide free registration, they rarely pay for room and board. Considering that most conferences are held in metro centers, the price of attendance is dramatically high and would likely weigh out any compensation one could receive. (SXSW recommends their group-rate hotels at $300 a night, which for their 4 night event is $1,200.) Therefore, the real cost of SXSW is more like $1,685, plus additional meals. Even small conferences have costs way beyond a typical teacher’s spending money.

And, most PD sessions and conferences rarely achieve the revolutionary goal of transforming one’s classroom. At best, conferences expose educators to a new trend that may impact their intention of trying a new methodology, or will bolster their support of a practice they’re already doing. The networking element of conferences is useful, but these relationships tend to remain at the conference themselves which are largely lecture-centric, leaving little space for relationships to develop. Most educators stay within their social groups. Little information has time to process after conferences because teachers are thrown back into the classroom with little time to reflect or implement their plans.

At worst, PD reinforces banal platitudes of “improving education for all our students”, wastes teachers’ little planning time, spends a boatload of money, and reinforces the notion that a teacher’s job is not respected, valued, or trusted. After all, many education conferences are set up to bolster those who are doing something outside of their classroom, as paying to present at an event is more advantageous to someone who wishes to sell or promote something. Further, in-house PD tends to promote group-think, which may cause negativity or a lack of perspective.

I have rarely attended PD that was worthwhile. Although I’ve been to multiple of the above conferences (and I’ve had a great time at most of them), I have never walked away with anything more meaningful, educationally speaking, than my individual research — or at best, something that I could have Googled and found countless of free resources. There is a rush of seeing a ton of impactful educators, talking lively about cool things in our classrooms, and enjoying San Diego or Austin — living like a rock star of sorts in a nice hotel and concert-style lecture halls. But I’m not sure if that’s a great use of our limited budgets — I’d rather have a fair stipend for the individualized work I do outside of school.

None of this is meant to imply that an educator can’t obtain valuable insights from PD, nor that attending or presenting PD cannot be useful. Being accepted as a conference presenter can speak volumes about one’s work and offer new avenues to further explore one’s ideas. Yet, I want to argue that the vast majority of PD is horribly outdated and seeping away funds that could be better utilized for both individuals and schools — and that better alternatives already exist.
Individualizing PD

Educators are trained to be experts at learning information. Most of our training is centered on absorbing a lot of content then putting it into practice in our classrooms. Many of our backgrounds are centered on high academic performance in school — and almost all of us have college training in research and academic reading. It’s incredibly odd that PD tends to center an expert voice delivering content, especially when we know most won’t be able to longingly pay their full attention, nor connect everything to their classrooms.

A keystone of progressive education is providing students with voice and choice, connecting to one’s purpose, and disestablishing the teacher as an authoritarian leader. All of these are the same for teacher PD. Letting educators choose their own path — one that connects to their values and classroom commitments — would revolutionize how educators take in new ideas. Many educators already do this; they read books, write blogs, meet up online, and listen to podcasts, but not much of this is recognized by districts or administrators as “official” school-based PD.

What’s preventing educators from individualizing their PD is a lack of time, space, and finances. Some districts have begun shortening or eliminating school days to allow for in-house PD, and others have shifted from whole staff PD to individualized goals. Ultimately, putting PD in the hands of educators would reap the most reward:

1. Establish multiple paths for educators to meet professional development goals (e.g. SMART goals). These goals should be open-ended and mostly based on an educator’s choice combined with conversation with an administrator. These initiatives are well-documented by EdSurge.

2. Give time and space for educators to plan out how to meet said goals. As mentioned previously, providing time off during the school day is needed for professional growth.

3. Finance educator initiatives with school/district funds, as opposed to expensive whole group PD models.

4. Support individualized research, podcast listening, visiting another’s classroom, reading, workshops, and large-scale planning (e.g. cross-disciplinary projects.)

5. Provide CEUs (continuing education credits) and financial opportunities for educators who complete PD.

Educators should not be burned out by finding ways to improve their practice. Using a small portion of PD funds to offer stipends to educators who complete their self-selected initiatives would further motivate teachers to improve their practice, and build a better overall workforce. Treating educators like professionals is key to establishing a solid education system, and one major incentive is pay.
There is still room for some whole school PD, especially in concepts that may not naturally be sought out (e.g., bias and sensitivity training, suicide awareness.) But again, the vast majority of PD could be thrown out (e.g. the latest ed tech, SEL, PBL, other buzzwords, standardized test prep.) This isn’t because I believe these concepts aren’t important — it’s just that educators will self-select PD that works for their students regardless, and it will be more empowering.

Change on the Horizon
Finding content online about education is not an easy task. There’s not one trusted hub to find perfect information, nor will there ever be. Still, educators have so many resources available to start an individualized journey such as the Edcamp unconference movement, which are free of charge—like this Edcamp on social justice in February, 2020, or the Leading Equity Virtual Summit, an entirely free online conference from January 2nd to 7th, 2020. Cult of Pedagogy offers many examples of schools attempting to redefine PD.

Edcamp claims that 80% of administrators exposed to their model allow it for teacher training credit. They offer a template that could be engineered for any learning event. Further, connecting to microcredentials could allow districts to point educators toward specific trusted outlets, where educators would be “certified” in a particular focus. (This is the next goal for us to offer through the Human Restoration Project.)

Creating a global alliance of educators learning and benefiting from one another, without financial burden or challenges of physical location, would improve the profession substantially. No more 45 minute lackluster PD sermons after school; no more expensive conferences; no more valuable time and energy wasted. By promoting a self-directed PD model that awards teachers professional time and financial opportunity, we would instill the progressive values we want in the classroom for both students and teachers.

A Hypothetical Progressive Microcredential
Human Restoration Project is in the process of building a microcredentialing platform, launching in early 2020.

We want educators to feel rewarded for investing in progressive pedagogy, beyond the inherent benefit of radicalizing the classroom toward pro-student outcomes. Through an entirely free online course system, educators will be able to read, discuss, watch, and reflect on key tenants of progressive education, such as critical pedagogy and gradeless learning. Upon completion of each course, one will receive a certified microcredential which can be displayed on LinkedIn, social media, or a resume via code that ties to our organization. This means that we can publicly display what you’ve created via the badge!

We believe this will open up many opportunities for progressive educators across the world:

- Allowing districts, especially progressive networks, to help onboard and continue to push progressive thought.
- Give individuals an opportunity to both engage in progressive thought, and be rewarded through district acknowledgement.
- Continue to consolidate progressive resources in one place, all quality and available for free.

Our goal for microcredentialing is to allow educators, administrators, and districts to interact with HRP’s resources, podcasts, and research collections and receive credit via through institution. By partnering with schools, networks, and universities, we’ll be able to certify our offerings. We will provide instructions for one to provide evidence for CEUs/district PD regulation. Further, we’re actively seeking partnerships for college accreditation for a standard course credit fee. As always, all materials offered through HRP will be entirely free, including all microcredentials.

---

Honoring the Truth: The Dishonor in Spiritual Bypassing the State of Education

Traci Nicole Smith

Collapsing in her recliner, a weary teacher props her swollen legs onto the foot rest. The toll of her day weighs down her body as she sinks into the cushion.
Reflection of the first hour of her day turns the corners of her lips up revealing a smile. Reminiscing about joy adorning three of her students’ faces while learning new material. She tickled with delight.

Following her giddiness, the feeling of frustration rose up. Flashes of 42 students crammed into her tiny classroom edged out any pleasure. Ten students sat in chairs with no desks. Oversized teen bodies sardined on top of each other during her last four periods.

In the last hour, two students left in handcuffs. An argument over a stepped-on toe led to voices raised. With one insult too many, fists flew. A girl on the front row pulled the office buzzer. In a matter of seconds, two police officers entered and arrested the boys.

Her school resided in a high-poverty area on the South side of town. Arrests were standard for her students and their parents.

The conditions of the school mirrored the dismal area around it. Boasting the highest crime rate in the city. Dilapidated structures of peeling paint, mold, and decay adorned the school grounds. Antiquated and corroded playground equipment rusted in the ground.

Unappealing and uninviting energy swirled around the parking lot.

Inside the school, ripped pages, torn covers, and scribbles decorated the books. Uncomfortable, vandalized, and structurally unbalanced furniture accessorized the rooms. An air of despair flowed through small pockets of hope permeating the hallways. The teachers radiated positivity despite an oppressive setting.

The day in review casted a dimness on her mood. Overwhelm poured into her sunken heart as her eyes blinked closed. The teacher faded into a shallow sleep state as the clock struck 6:00 p.m.

A rumble in her belly sounded off an internal alarm. Hunger waves signaled time for dinner. Leftovers from Sunday supper allowed her to heat and eat her food within 15 minutes. The call from the foam and feathers on her bed beckoned her to an early bedtime.

Curiosity on Twitter guided her check on her online friends before slumbering. Tweets denoting teachers’ bliss dominated the feed. Discouragement pulsated through her run-down petite frame causing her to question her experiences.

One thread with dozens of responses pierced her heavy heart. A call to quiet unhappy teachers snowballed into harsh words in a mound of replies. They demanded the resignation of undedicated teachers posting grievances on social media.

A racing heart followed shallow breaths of anxiety. Her eyes wide open as they stared at the ceiling.

Awakened by suggestions for her departure from education. As sadness crawled from the phone screen onto her hand, she rolled over onto her side.
Her phone placed face down on the nightstand with Twitter closed.

Turning towards the other side of her bed, she reached for her journal and flicked on her night light. Pen in hand, she scribbled down her thoughts.

“How is it that everyone is happy, and I am stressed to the max? Am I the Grinch? Are the other teachers living in Whoville and joyous no matter what? Do they face the issues I face?”

“I am dedicated. I am also beyond exhausted.”

Deep within, her light shined as determination beat resignation. Quitting was not an option. She loved teaching and resented the suggestion to leave the field. She closed her journal and turned out the light.

Perplexed, she lied still and meditated on her wounded feelings.

The thud of logic crashed upon her head. Compassion filled her forgiving heart. She realized the phenomenon that punctuated the Twitter feed was a form of spiritual bypass.

Theses teachers cushioned their pain by denying its existence. Any candor was banished from their reality. The appearance of perfection in their jobs circumvented the compounding problems that loom in education. This is the essence of spiritual bypass.

However, the bottom lines converge. The toxicity of denial equals the toxicity of negativity.

Overpositivity betrays the veracity of the challenges faced in high-poverty schools. The dismissal minimizes the reasons to institute broad changes to the school system.

Without change to the current system, the teacher attrition continues and intensifies.

Every year, high-poverty schools experience greater losses of teachers. Fewer graduates from college choose education, which creates a larger deficit of uncertified teachers. Thus, the increasing reports of turmoil lessen the desire to be a teacher.

The consequences of inequity among schools devastate communities and debilitate opportunities for economic improvement.

This link provides a more in-depth look at the statistics.

The hubris of spiritual bypass creates a dangerous myopia. Teachers’ eyes must remain wide open to the systemic issues of public education. Describing the state of education in honest and plain language is the only way out of this dark hole.

We must shine a flashlight in the dark places and figure out how to turn the light on for everyone. Having a solutions-oriented mindset facilitates a healthy way to voice opinions for change. Complaining and negativity are toxic.

So is suppressing the truth.

A PROGRESSIVE RESPONSE TO “ED REFORM’S LOST DECADE”

nick covington

It’s fitting that the Fordham Institute’s Robert Pondiscio begins his latest piece, Ed. reform’s lost decade: Twilight of the technocrats, with what could have been the epitaph of this generation of education reform, from Jonathan Alter in the 2010 film “Waiting For Superman”:

“Twenty-five years ago, there was no proof that something else worked. Well, now we know what works. We know that it’s just a lie that disadvantaged kids can’t learn. We know that if you apply the right accountability standards you can get fabulous results. So why would we do something else?”

So why would we do something else? For those who believe the measure of a quality education can be distilled into an assessment score, the last 20 years of data must be intensely disappointing. 2019 NAEP scores for both 4th and 8th graders were up marginally compared to 1992 while down marginally compared to 2017. According to recently released 2018 PISA results, while there have been some science gains in recent years, especially among students in the lowest scoring percentiles, 15 year-olds scoring below average in math and reading had even lower scores in 2018 than their counterparts in 2000 and 2003, respectively.
Meanwhile — *gestures at everything* — we have the largest wealth gap **since the Roaring 20s.** Poor kids are more likely to [remain poor](#). We are approaching a nearly $2T student loan debt bubble. We face a broken political system following a global trend of democratic [backsliding into authoritarianism](#). A drug and mental health crisis combined with a broken healthcare system has seen US life expectancy decrease 3 years in a row. And in 2018 the US had [57 times as many school shootings](#) as other major nations combined — among so many other poor outcomes unique to Americans — all while we sit on the precipice of a planetary environmental disaster. Whew.

Traditional, standardized education reform has done nothing to alleviate any of these systemic social, political, economic, or environmental ills nor has it created any kind of widespread positive social transformation, though it certainly has contributed to socioeconomic sorting and perpetuated the severe inequality we see today. Pondiscio, it seems, concedes this point: "One lesson of the past decade may be that if reducing poverty is your public policy goal, education might not be your primary strategy."

So if the last 20 years of top-down school reform (NCLB, Race to the Top, Common Core) haven’t improved our overall social, political, and economic — let alone educational — health; however, they have cost trillions of dollars to implement over time.

Between 1997–2011, the Department of Education budget
nearly doubled from $33.52B to $63B a year, reaching a high of $138B in 2009 (with funding from the Recovery Act), while Race to the Top disbursed money through a one-time $4.35 billion grant to states based on a complicated application formula, and though it may be impossible to nail down a total cost in the push for national standards the Common Core has had a price tag estimated as high as $80B.

Regarding the distribution of the benefits of Common Core spending, the authors of a paper published in the Educational Policy Analysis Archives concluded: “In essence, those who set directions for the Common Core and those who provided resources for its implementation have benefitted, even as potential benefits to schools, educators, and students are elusive, and the entire claim may ultimately be empty.” (emphasis mine)

They continue:

“For-profit grantees that provided Common Core tests, aligned curriculum, or other resources benefitted through increased sales and revenue. A survey of vendors of educational software and digital content indicated that their market grew by 57% between the 2010–11 and 2012 – 13 school years due to the Common Core and related demands for new assessments (Cavanaugh, 2014b). This growth occurred even though it is not evident that such products improve teaching and learning or reduce achievement gaps.”

Even as, the authors conclude, “implementation…has driven attention to metrics and measurable growth at the expense of attention to non-tested content or students’ social, emotional, and civic development”.

But what explanation is there for knowing more today about “what works” than at the outset of reform while the benefits of “what works” have failed to materialize? Of course, Pondiscio blames “intransient vested interests, including teachers unions, school boards, superintendents, and administrators” who “have no incentive to reform and reliably block it at every turn” and claims that “institutional racism, segregation, and the broad array of social ills that have diverted education reform’s attention from its core business of teaching and learning”.

Aside from the fundamental issues of the de facto segregation of schools, chronic underfunding, and the fact that states vary wildly in their spending on elementary and secondary education as a percentage of GDP, blaming teachers and their unions as “intransient vested interests” misses the point that while those doing the very labor of teaching bore the consequences, the incentives of accountability-driven reform went to markets adjacent to schools. While the market grew for for-profit vendors, testing companies, and distributors, the period of 2009–2018 also saw public sector union membership decline by 3.5% and teacher pay fall 4.5%.

At the same time our national attention was shifted away from the social and emotional well-being of our students, teacher voice was being devalued and teaching was deprofessionalized for anything other than its relationship to the testing and standards machine. This essential shift in our attention and the work of teachers from cultivating “social, emotional, and civic development” to micromanaging “measurable growth” for students and “value-added performance” for teachers should be a metaphor for the reform movement broadly, as we stand now before a decade of flat test scores yet have acquired a profound mental health crisis in which suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 15–24.

Again, as Pondiscio reaffirms in his piece, “So much reform, so little to show for it.”
It was about six months ago that I was introduced to Wendell Berry’s writing through a reference in a Michael Pollan book. In this book, Pollan points to Berry’s concept of eating as an agricultural act. There was something about this concept that sparked in me a desire to learn more. Not only have I not emerged from the Wendell Berry rabbit hole into which I descended, if I manage to emerge at all, I will not do so unchanged.

There is something foundational about Berry’s writing that set its hook in me. Somehow, through the lens of his farming experience, and being anchored in pragmatic thoughtfulness, he seems to have unearthed a common ill found in the metaphor of industrial farming that can be applied generously throughout our culture. He is a Kentucky farmer and writer, born of my father’s generation, and the last person I would have expected to find a connection with. In particular, as an educator, it seems strange that I might find inspiration in these writings about abandoned rural communities, horse powered farming, and the passionate defense of a way of life long lost to the cruelties of industrialization. However, as I have had more time to let his words find a home in me, I am now starting to see parallels between his world and my own.

Eyes To Acres
To make as much sense as I can of our predicament, I turn to Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute, in Salina, Kansas, and his perception that for any parcel of land in human use there is an “eyes-to-acres ratio” that is right and is necessary to save it from destruction. By “eyes” Wes means a competent watchfulness, aware of the nature and the history of the place, constantly present, always alert for signs of harm and signs of health. The necessary ratio of eyes to acres is not constant from one place to another, nor is it scientifically predictable or computable for any place, because from place to place there are too many natural and human variables. Farmers without Farmland — The Atlantic

The correlate in our world of eyes-to-acres is classroom size, or in my profession, caseload. How can an educator truly tend to the needs of each individual in their care if they aren’t afforded the necessary conditions to forge a meaningful relationship with those whose care they are supposed to be tending to? In California public schools, the typical counselor caseload is around 800 students and the average high school classroom is around 35 students (although I do not reside in California any more, it’s a useful example to draw from). If we, as educators, were to follow an eyes-to-acres methodology, what might that mean for each of us? Would it be too much to suggest that my eyes-to-acres might be different than someone else’s? And could we be ok with that?

Lurking further in the background of everything we do in our culture is the premise that we must be “efficient” and “cost-effective”, allowing the invisible hand of the market to make the inevitable and necessary corrections to any flaws in the pathway, like water seeking the most efficient path to sea. And because education is simply “content” that must be delivered/acquired, the thinking goes, according to market principles, how should this take place? What are the technological innovations that can scale up that content delivery efficiently, driving down costs, while driving up scores? This is in direct conflict with an eyes-to-acres sensibility.

We all know education is a human endeavor that can’t/shouldn’t be industrialized. There is no formula for success other than suffering through the burden of being an individual with unique talents and shortcomings that must be recognized and reckoned with; interacting with other human beings burdened by their own unique talents and shortcomings.
I want to acknowledge, and profess my belief in, the necessity of a necessarily messy endeavor. And in this endeavor, we should be willing to sacrifice efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the service of the humanity of the individual in front of us, enabling a “competent watchfulness...alert for signs of harm and signs of health.”

Monoculture of Annual Crops
Unlike the typical US farm bill, the 50-Year Farm Bill attempts to address the real and ongoing problems of agriculture: erosion, toxicity, loss of genetic and species diversity, and the destruction of rural communities, or the destruction, where it still survives, of the culture of husbandry. It begins with the fact that at present, 80% of the land is planted annually in annual crops such as corn and beans, and 20% in perennials. It proposes a 50-year program for the gradual inversion of that ratio to 80% perennial cover and 20% annuals. Interview from the Guardian

Like the annual crops produced in monoculture that must be pumped with all sorts of chemicals to yield a product from year-to-year, so too are the students in the current system. The “annual” approach in education manifests by teaching to standards as defined by grade level and assigning responsibility of producing those standards to a teacher without any regard to the way natural human relationships work; also with little regard for the wisdom of the teacher tasked with production. A good “yield” is defined by the individual (re)producing grade level content across a common core (monoculture), as measured by some mono-dimensional assessment tool (quality of yield), and then passing them along to another teacher who repeats the process the next year (annual crop production).

However, as the soil is depleted of its fertility through misuse and misunderstanding, one must apply more and more chemical interventions to get it to produce what one thinks it should. We are also caught in this trap, having to use more and more chemical interventions to get our students to produce what we want or think they should. In the meantime, their “soils” are being depleted, robbing them of its life affirming properties that just might, left to its own peculiar nature, produce a personally meaningful life.

The antithesis of educational monoculture would be to plant a diverse crop of perennial plants, as the 50 year Farm Bill Berry co-wrote proposes. Perhaps our flipped ratio would be 20% common core, 80% self-direction. There are examples for us to draw on. For instance, the Waldorf approach (perennial agriculture), where a teacher follows a cohort of students from year to year. Maybe the high school version of this would be a single subject area teacher following a cohort through all grades (I have found in my work that students often deeply connect with their arts teachers for this reason). Maria Montessori’s approach seems to embody both eyes-to-acres and perennial education as I am now proposing it, but I must confess that I am not very familiar with its application outside of a theoretical context.

Perhaps a more radical proposition might be the one room schoolhouse, the original eyes-to-acres proposition. Here one would find a single teacher with students of all ages and abilities (true learning diversity). Perhaps that is what Acton Academy is already doing? Or perhaps One Stone? Maybe this idea is the equivalent of a horse drawn plow: slow and laborious, but directly connects the farmer to the land whereby “health and harm” are immediately apparent while keeping the scale appropriately human. And perhaps this is where technology could make that seemingly anachronistic paradigm relevant again as content is so readily available. However, it’s not just the acquisition of content, but the application of it. As humans, we require someone to model what the good stewardship of content acquisition and application looks like, in much the same way as good farming.

Think Little
But even the most articulate public protest is not enough. We don’t live in the government or in institutions or in our public utterances and acts, and the environmental crisis has its roots in our lives. By the same token, environmental health will also be rooted in our lives. That is, I take, simply a fact, and in the light of it we can see how superficial and foolish we would be to think that we could correct what is wrong merely by tinkering with the institutional machinery. The changes that are
required are fundamental changes in the way we are living...For most of the history of this country our motto, implied or spoken, has been Think Big. A better motto, and an essential one now, is Think Little. That implies the necessary change of thinking and feeling, and suggests the necessary work. Think Little — Whole Earth Magazine 1969

While there is a lot to unpack in Berry’s Think Little essay, one of it’s central themes concerns the way we daily conduct ourselves in the world, not only it’s environmental impact, but perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, it’s interpersonal impact. So often, and especially for myself, we think about ways we could potentially make a big impact in the future rather than a small impact right now. This is where I hope to turn the excrement of my cynicism into some meaningful fertilizer for the enrichment of the immediate.

Another concept Berry uses quite often in his writing is Loving Care. Love, in any context, is a dangerous word in its unique ability to mean everything and nothing simultaneously. However, Loving Care, in this context, is akin to empathy, kindness, and compassion, but is somehow different, and for some reason, this idea has taken root deeper in me than the others. My best guess is that, for whatever reason, latent in its meaning is the idea of work; that Loving Care is an action that requires work. One can’t passively lovingly care for another thing.

And now armed with this idea, I hope to Think Little daily with Loving Care. The context in which I practice is immaterial. I don’t need to wait for anything big to change, am not dependent on legislation, a new city, new job, a theology, etc., in order to practice it. And I might argue, that Loving Care in a traditional public school setting is qualitatively better than “whatever-loving-care-isn’t” in a progressive school setting.

The last thing I wish to touch on regarding this idea, and something that needs more direct experience to reach maturity in me, is that liking someone is not a prerequisite required in the application of Loving Care. In fact, that is probably when it is most needed and most likely to have a huge, little impact.

REVISITING DISOBEDIENCE INSTRUCTION AS CLASSROOM STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Accounted by Jonathan Kozol in On Being a Teacher, disobedience instruction is teaching students how to say “no” toward teacher authoritarianism or counter a teacher’s sweeping political statements. Although this runs counter to the traditional teaching narrative (why would I want a student to disobey me?), it is imperative that our children grow up to live in a flourishing democratic society. Our goal is not to create malignant people, but emboldened learners.
As Kozol writes,

It takes a bit of work to make it clear that I do not intend to urge them [students] to go home and be malicious to their folks, nor do I hope that they will feel the urge to be malicious here in school. I draw a line, as well as I can, between two very different states of mind: the sheer vindictive malice of defiance and aggression on the one hand, and a vigorous note of ethical irreverence on the other. The first attacks the person, while the second concentrates on that person’s viewpoints and beliefs.

The hidden curriculum in school reinforces the cultural norm not to question the authority of a teacher or an assignment’s explicit narrative or bias. In a world where large corporate interests dominate civil life and infrastructure, our students must be equipped to take charge and organize. Some of the next generation have begun (Greta Thunberg, for example), yet many are jaded, apathetic, and submissive to the life they’re set up for. As Ira Shor and Paulo Freire wrote in A Pedagogy for Liberation,

What we do in the classroom is not an isolated moment separate from the “real world.” It is entirely connected to the real world and it is the real world, which places both powers and limits on any critical course. Because the world is in the classroom, whatever transformation we provoke has a conditioning effect outside our small space. But the outside has a conditioning effect on the space also, interfering with our ability to build a critical culture separate from the dominant mass culture.

The question is how do we build a school system that cares about the autonomy of its students while promoting a challenging environment? Will students take on difficult tasks if not forced into traditional curricula and behaviorism? And how can teachers band together to create caring classroom communities that ensure every student is treated fairly and with dignity? Teaching this way requires teachers to understand implicit bias, use a decolonized curricula, and incorporate restorative justice. Understanding the pedagogy is half the battle. Every teacher must be equipped with the proper mindset. As E.W. Eisner states,

Teachers still close the classroom door and do what they know how to do and believe is best for the students they teach. In this sense, changes in the teachers’ ideology may be among the important changes can be made in the field of education.

However, this pedagogy without systemic change does little to counter authoritarianism in the classroom. And at least some systemic change is possible at the classroom level.

Allowing for Choice

The first obvious systemic change in empowering learners to say “no” is providing fewer opportunities that something could be said “no” to. As in, allowing students more freedom to make choices. This is not a choice between a set number of assignments — rather, a literal infinite choice on what to learn and how it is done. As educational critic Alfie Kohn has documented, when students decide their own outcomes individually or collectively, they’re not only happier and less stressed, but they learn more content.

In a traditional structure, it isn’t possible for a teacher to completely avoid standards. Yet, it is incredibly empowering for learners to understand the underlying system and find ways to manipulate, work around, and achieve — while simultaneously pursuing their own interests. A teacher can negotiate with their class and collectively, students and teachers can build a curriculum together that addresses what the learning community is interested in.

But what of students who don’t want to participate at all in the learning process? There is a misunderstanding among many adults that some children just “don’t want to learn” — that they have no intrinsic motivation. Of course, these students are interested in learning — these same adults will identify video games, social media, or relationships as “what these students want to do” — but these topics aren’t deemed as valued as traditional school subjects.

It’s difficult to motivate learners who are apathetic, disengaged, or disinterested in the traditional learning standards. There’s no simple answer for everyone. However, the act of building relationships, being transparent about the situation (e.g., graduation requirements, standardized testing), and forming that collective learning community can at least show a
student that you’re on their side. Allowing students to meet the minimum requirements provided by the state is okay. Letting students pursue their passions within school is fantastic. By not shutting down student interests and marginalizing their behavior, teachers are forming a lasting bond that can lead to student success. (Importantly, this success isn’t necessarily academic. The success is recognizing a student’s passions and pursuits as valuable and can serve a societal good. Relationships are the cornerstone to learning — and this form of success doesn’t box learning into the small box of “core” subject areas.)

Instilling a moral sense of dignity which is extended to all learners allows us to connect and negotiate the learning process. As John Dale and Emery J. Hyslop-Margison write in *Paulo Freire: Teaching for Freedom and Transformation*, liberatory choice and action is ‘good’ because rather than oppressing, manipulating, or coercing other people, it provides them with space for authenticity, choice, and actualization, or in Freire’s terminology, conscientização. Dignity exists for no one until all people within all situations are afforded dignity as well. One cannot rationally expect to be treated fairly unless such treatment is extended to the entire community of humankind... Our ‘good’ choices, then, must not interfere or impede the actions, dignity, and authenticity of others.

Choice is not limited to the day’s activities or how to display learning, but the assessment process as well. A liberating grading system — a gradeless system — is a requirement in truly humanizing classroom. As sj

...when we embrace a liberatory pedagogy, if we do not align our assessment practices with such practices, then we perpetuate the mind/body split and ill-prepare students with an understanding of their imminent power to transform the worlds in which they engage. A student who embodies the benefits of liberatory pedagogy has great potential to act on and transform dynamics of power that sustain dominant culture. For an educator to be half of a liberatory pedagogist is to further feed the system of education that survives on mechanizing and dehumanizing its recipients. Learning how to blend assessment to pedagogy is to provide an authentic educational experience. (emphasis mine)
Maintaining “Discipline”
If a student can say “no” to a teacher, how can order be kept? Much of the education system is built out of convenience. It’s hard to manage a group of students in school — they’re loud, have trouble sitting still, and can’t concentrate on one thing for long periods of time. This is what children do when subjected to the structure they’re placed in — it’s not a bad thing. Therefore, to imply a teacher keep 25–35 students completely silent, rarely socialize, and care about content that may or may not be important to them for hours during the day is unrealistic. To maintain an outdated classroom structure is dehumanizing. Because — in order to do this properly — a teacher must become an authoritarian.

It’s up to a progressive educator to realign what an “orderly classroom” looks like. Educators must reassess their biases toward classroom management that were likely taught in their teacher training program. As bell hooks states,

Although no one ever directly stated the rules that would govern our conduct, it was taught by example and reinforced by a system of rewards. As silence and obedience to authority were most rewarded, students learned that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom. Loudness, anger, emotional outbursts, and even something as seemingly innocent as unrestrained laughter were deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits were also associated with being a member of the lower classes. If one was not from a privileged class group, adopting a demeanor similar to that of the group could help one to advance. It is still necessary for students to assimilate bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable.

Does this mean that students will be running around the room, fighting each other, yelling constantly, and in general — causing chaos? No, of course not. This is not natural human behavior. Sudbury Schools have had students choose their own actions and curriculum for decades — and when visiting these schools, you’ll rarely find students acting this way. In fact, they’re usually much more calm and “orderly” than traditional schools. People crave structure — not necessarily the structure of a teacher’s regime handed down to them, but communally decided upon rules and behavioral expectations.

Again, the collective community deciding what rules and regulations matter to them is a central tenet to building a classroom where one can say “no.” Establishing prosocial behavior lends itself to prosocial behavior occurring. As William M. Bryant and Cayce McCamish write in Breaking All the Rules,

As it exists currently in schools, compassion is typically aligned with regret rather than care for self and others. Let us consider the following example. A student runs down the hall, turns a corner, and knocks violently into a younger, smaller student. Let us assume that the runner feels sorry for knocking down the other student. His/Her regret may develop into further regret when considering that he/she will likely be punished for violating a rule (do not run in the halls). On the other hand, given the same scenario, if a student based his/her future actions on a framework of compassion, the student would determine, even before beginning, that running in the hall is neither wise nor useful behavior — not because a rule dictates it — but because of the potential hazard his/her action would create for all the parties involved.

Additionally, a student who embodies compassion turns to foresight to ground his/her reason. In turn, compassion also rouses empathy for others (“I don’t want to hurt anyone”) and empathy for oneself (“I’d feel terrible if I was responsible for hurting someone”). When reason and compassion are coupled, a space to create a compassionate discipline is formed, and it is when such a space is created that respect for self and others can flourish.

This isn’t a replacement for all traditional discipline. For example, if a student is violent — removal from the classroom is warranted. Safety is still paramount. But the vast majority of school disciplinary action is taken on issues stemming from noncompliance.

Strengthening Humankind
So much emphasis is placed on learning material in school for the sole reason of “career and college readiness” — with “soft skills” set aside as a nice-to-have notion. (After all, it’s not measured or tied to funding.) Yet, a pedagogy that focuses on love, respect, tolerance, and choice fundamentally instills values
in a learner that will radically transform our society. Teaching students to say “no” doesn’t raise a generation of disrespectful youth. Rather, it raises critical thinkers who are able to explore, navigate, and pursue paths that respect the learners around them.

A classroom that introduces students to progressive pedagogy, dissects the school system and its curricula, allows for choice, promotes social-emotional well-being, and builds a true classroom community is one that builds flourishing humans.

As bell hooks writes in *Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love*:

*Because of the awareness that love and domination cannot coexist, there is a collective call for everyone to place learning how to love on their emotional and/or spiritual agenda. We have witnessed the way in which movements for justice that denounce dominator culture, yet have an underlying commitment to corrupt uses of power, do not really create fundamental changes in our societal structure. When radical activists have not made a core break with dominator thinking (imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy), there is no union of theory and practice, and real change is not sustained. That’s why cultivating the mind of love is so crucial. When love is the ground of our being, a love ethic shapes our participation in politics.*

Therefore, pursuing a classroom that builds upon collective learning, trust, and group purpose is transformational to solving the issues of today and tomorrow. Despite that being the mission statement of every single school, there is little structural change happening to meet these needs. Instead, we double down on standardized testing to “beat” other districts, states, and nations in solving these problems. Only by restructuring the learning process, and remeasuring our accountability, will we build a society that solves these problems.
An Indigenous Peoples’ History offers a needed, yet often unheard perspective on United States history. As a former US history teacher it was always concerning that content standards rarely mention Indigenous people and therefore, most are misinformed. Not only does this work expel ignorance of Indigenous society, but provides valuable resources, activities, and discussions for the classroom. It is the antithesis of textbook whitewashing.

This book tells the story of the United States as a colonialist settler-state, one that sought to crush and subjugate Indigenous populations. In spite of all that was done to them, Indigenous people are still here.

An Indigenous Peoples’ History consistently poses questions that counteract misinformation about Native communities, specifically stories that are usually taught in elementary school. This lends itself to fantastic conversations on whose history is taught in school, and offers students a chance to recognize whose curriculum they’re expected to learn for standardized tests. After all, a quintessential point of critical pedagogy is to decolonize the curriculum and understand the underlying political motives of the education system.

And unlike many textbooks, this work does not spare discussions about modern events that are shaped by history. It brings up the intolerance of sports team naming, the lack of Native representation in Hamilton, and deciphers political rhetoric vs. reality. All of these are framed around easily adapted class discussions that speak to the heart of a history class:

Due to its easy adaptability and readability, this work could fit into any established curriculum.
• The Humanities as an obvious choice for non-fiction reading that leads to grappling and needed discussions.
• Mathematics and science for social justice through the policies and environmental connections laid within.
• The arts and music for the influence and cultural importance of Indigenous cultures.

Again, the ability for students to critically interpret the curriculum and its flaws are so needed, and this work helps exposes the mainstream cultural narrative of the United States. It opens up discussions to what other histories have been erased and what lies are interwoven in the “standards.”

Nothing is more engaging than “going down the rabbit hole”, realizing that what one’s been taught isn’t the whole truth or isn’t the truth at all. Analyzing past stories and asking probing questions — I think of Squanto and the “Thanksgiving story” — how often do we ask why Squanto would know English in the 1600s? How many know that Squanto was kidnapped and taken to Europe as a slave, and escaped and returned to North America? It allows students to begin to see the world for what it really is, and ingrains a place for social justice to stand with those who are fighting.

I recommend this work to any educator to use with their students, as well as for their own knowledge of the actual Indigenous history of the United States.
The Labor of Lunch by Jennifer E. Gaddis is a treatise on the United States school lunch system: its history, battle over nutritional quality, and those who are fighting to change it. School lunch is a perplexing thing. We tend to accept that chicken nuggets, pizza, burgers, and french toast sticks are “normal”, and that students who don’t like it should just bring their own, nutritious lunch. School lunch is the only “accepted” place where students are subjected to financial labeling and shunning. As Gaddis writes, 

Math, English, and a host of other academic subjects are offered to children free of charge, but when they walk through the cafeteria doors, any facade of egalitarianism fades. No one expects a math teacher to collect children’s fees at the classroom door. Cafeteria workers, on the other hand, must sort children according to their eligibility for free, reduced-price, or paid lunches and charge them accordingly.

The work opens with an in-depth history of school lunch since the expansion of public schools in the Progressive Era. Each decade mirrors the racist, sexist, and classist spheres that fill all other facets of American life. Central to the thesis of the book, and the overall solution to the problem, is the promotion of “lunch ladies” to full-time, respected employees — which has been counteracted by the sexist view of housewives and treatment of working class women.

Early reformers in the Progressive Era saw school lunch as a social justice issue, rallying mostly women workers to build kitchens within schools that provided healthy, quality meals. Caroline Hunt, a prominent activist, emphasized the importance of these quality meals for everyone — regardless of race and class — but met resistance in a similar way to today. She met the fate of neoliberal tendencies toward “career technical education” over actual systemic solutions. Hunt was told to focus on sewing and cooking (the “career technical education” for women at the time), rather than any political economic critique.

Another Progressive Era reformer, Emma Smedley, experimented with a school cafeteria program that would “pay for itself.” She met with students and explained to them the organization’s non-profit model, which included paying school lunch employees a fair wage that mirrored teachers — they were full time staff that made everything from scratch on-site. Students were hired on a small salary to help clean and prep food. Smedley, similar to Dewey’s experiential learning ideals, wanted to integrate food across the curriculum and saw student involvement as a flourishing academic opportunity.

Overtime though, Gaddis explains that the Progressive Era reforms lost steam — and as the 1920s came, limited economic resources meant that most new programs were formed by mothers in middle to upper class homes. Therefore, the working class was left behind; the mission proved too difficult to manage at a mass scale (similar to how systemic change is necessary in any system destined to change societal injustice.)

The 1930s saw the federal government take control of most school lunch programs. In the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration provided funds to manage healthy lunch programs (which disproportionately favored white neighborhoods — a consistent theme of school funding.) And in the 1940s, the government continued to expand with the National School Lunch Act of 1946 (NSLA), which gave the federal government the ability to fund states who managed an adequate lunch system. This, as Gaddis explains, was great in theory, but set in motion a corporate takeover of lunchrooms.

Vendors could easily produce “food” that undercut the margins of a full time staff at a school making healthier options. Poor school districts, who relied on NSLA funding, were essentially left with no choice but to accept this corporate takeover. Many pushed back, namely the Black Panther Party in the 1960s who organized free breakfast and lunch drives for the community — but at the height of the Cold War
and racial tension, the government (FBI) was worried at the support the BPP was receiving. Further, many outcry at the state of school lunch, which at this point was essentially gruel.

Therefore, the 1970s saw a wave of school lunch reforms that focused on healthy eating. Yet the financial needs of such a program, plus calls for universal free lunch, were again shot down or co-opted by corporate influence and control. As Gaddis writes,

Feeding children, unlike transportation or healthcare, had long been considered a ‘women’s responsibility.’ The premise of a universally free school lunch program struck an ideological nerve in the 1970s, just as the very idea of experimental penny-lunch programs had done in the early 1900s. During both eras, feminist activists were gaining strength in numbers and challenging the assumptions of patriarchal capitalism. In its official publications, ASFSA never explicitly linked its proposal for a universally free school lunch program with the concerns of second wave feminism. If enacted, the legislation would most certainly have lessened the burden of unpaid care work for all women with school-aged children. But the white middle-class mothers who played such an important role in pressuring Congress to pass the NSLA back in 1946 didn’t take up the fight for a universally free lunch program. Instead, many of them fled the NSLP altogether as food quality declined, prices rose, and school lunch became stigmatized as ‘welfare’ food. Middle-class mothers who could afford to take on the labor of lunch increasingly opted to send their children to school with a packed lunch.

At the same time, convenience foods controlled by big business, such as frozen pizzas, prebreaded chicken patties, and “airline meals” entered the system — as they were affordable, simple options. More children could be fed for much cheaper (and students would eat the food), but the labor force deskilled and food quality declined further. There was little to no nutritional value. Now the “lunch lady” did very little actual cooking. People pushed back against this system, which led to the modern interpretation of what Gaddis calls “Real Food Lite.” It’s no longer completely unhealthy pizza…it’s just pizza with some nutritional value. Now we face even more corporate control.

The reason I explain all of this is that it’s only a surface of what Gaddis covers in The Labor of Lunch. Anyone who wants to understand the context of why lunch is the way it is should seek out and read this work. Hundreds upon hundreds of sources line an extensive review of why things are the way they are.

Yet Gaddis is hopeful that these issues will be solved, as she states:

Thousands of dedicated parents, school lunch workers, public health advocates, local food activists, and nonprofit organizations are already engaged in this work.

The other half of the book is dedicated to showing how certain schools, led primarily by women activists, are attempting to solve these problems. The Minneapolis Public School System incorporates farm-to-table healthy foods which are prepared mostly on-
site. “Lunch ladies” are respected workers who are stationed full-time at the school. Similar to the goals of the Progressive Era, food is not only for sustenance, but a part of the curriculum.

Minneapolis incorporates “food testing” days, which consists of students trying new foods once or twice a month — with the goal of expanding the palette. Sadly, many children don’t know what “healthy food” tastes like, and it requires a lot of consistent exposure to adapt to a sustainable way of eating. The food system is driven by parent, student, and nutritionist involvement, and is part of the curriculum.

Food intelligence, although rarely brought up, is a serious issue in the United States. When corporate branding and easy-to-access unhealthy foods plague the landscape, it’s difficult for children — and parents — to navigate their options. This is especially true for those in the working class, who have less time and resources to invest in experimenting/learning healthy cooking recipes. By investing in the food curriculum, we can help families recognize the value of growing their own food, making cheap, yet nutritional recipes, and expanding palettes to appreciate non-additive foods.

However, these nonprofits and experimental school district programs can only carry their mission so far. The same neoliberal methodology that “socialism is bad” carries over to this battle. The idea of “wasting money” by providing “handouts” to students has consistently been a losing battle in our political system. And therefore the argument becomes, ...using tax dollars to build school kitchens and cafeterias was an unnecessary expense for urban school authorities to absorb when children could simply bring food from home or purchase something from a vendor. In other words, education dollars should be used to hire more teachers, reduce class sizes, and improve instructional quality, not to feed children cheap (let alone free) school lunches.

Just as SEL has become the latest fad in schools (which is also corporate-influenced. SEL was never about meditating to improve test scores, it was about eliminating the anxiety-ridden test!), lunch reform runs the risk of neoliberal influence. As outrage grows over lunch shaming and debt, as well as lunch menus rattle off McDonald’s-esque daily meals, we must remember that this issue won’t be solved without actual government funding. It’s not enough to have donations to non-profits or the facade of government concern. Without across-the-board funding, those historically disadvantaged will continue to be disadvantaged, and real change won’t occur.

And when this funding occurs, we must place the needs of children in the hands of those closest to the solution: working class women — who primarily comprise the thousands of “lunch ladies” across the United States. Many of these women understand how to solve these problems, and just require the tools necessary to do so. Many of the modern activist (and historical activist) programs are started by “lunch ladies.” And notably, when these programs do take place, it’s actually cheaper than the corporate option.

That being said, if you’re interested in learning more about the food revolution, check out some resources Gaddis has referenced:

- Center for Ecoliteracy
- Rooted in Community
- Minneapolis Public School Farm-to-Table Program
- Good Food Purchasing Program
- Chef Ann Foundation

And if you’re interested in becoming informed on the movement, and why we’re here, I highly recommend checking out The Labor of Lunch. Personally, I’m considering using it for an upcoming school project. Why not invite students into this conversation? After all, they’re the ones most connected to this issue!
Tucked away in a bottom-shelf corner of the Education section of Half Price Books, I found a small text I had never heard of called “The Case for Constructivist Classrooms” by Martin G. Brooks and Jacqueline Grennon Brooks. Originally published in 1993, a decade after “A Nation at Risk” launched the national conversation about “failing schools” and the modern education reform movement, and re-published in 1999, just three years before the next big standardized reform push with NCLB, constructivism has been a consistent but controversial and often caricatured counterweight to the recurring top-down reform movements — rooted in accountability and standardized test scores — that have defined the last 30 years of the educational debate. As the authors of “The Case for Constructivist Classrooms” address in the introduction:

...yes, it is presumably more comforting to think of all students as blank slates with similar cognitive profiles than it is to view them as individuals whose life experiences have shaped singular sets of cognitive needs. Nonetheless, more and more teachers continue to gravitate toward constructivist principles because . . . well, because they make sense. Teaching and learning are complicated, labyrinthine processes filled with dead ends, false positives, contradictions, multiple truths, and a great deal of confusion. Trying to simplify and quantify the teaching/learning dynamic wrings out its essence and renders it a reductio ad absurdum. Over the past several years, then, the case for constructivist classrooms has been strengthened and also has become more acute...Engagement in meaningful work, initiated and mediated by skillful teachers, is the only high road to real thinking and learning. (p. x)

The authors could not have been more prescient in their framing of the present debate surrounding student learning, testing, and the broader standardized reform movement.

When Finland shocked the world by topping the PISA charts in 2000 and again in 2009, journalists and educators sought the advice of Pasi Sahlberg, then the Finnish Minister of Education. “What made Finnish kids ‘the smartest in the world’?”, they wondered. Sahlberg’s response surprised many observers: “We prepare children to learn how to learn, not how to take a test. We are not much interested in PISA. It’s not what we are about.”

As journalist Amanda Ripley noted in her observations and comparison between the schools systems of Finland and the United States in “The Smartest Kids in the World: And How They Got That Way”: “The more time I spent in Finland, the more I started to worry that the reforms sweeping across the United States had the equation backwards. We were trying to reverse engineer a high-performance teaching culture through dazzlingly complex performance evaluations and value-added data analysis.”

Well, what are we about? Do we recognize that “teaching and learning are complicated, labyrinthine processes filled with dead ends, false positives, contradictions, multiple truths, and a great deal of confusion”? If that’s the case, it seems unreasonable that we should adopt “value-added data analysis” measures for teachers or distill student performance down to any single set of assessments. Are we preparing children to “learn how to learn” or “preparing them to take a test”? The purpose of school is really a suite of values that influences its structure and shapes the way students are viewed inside its overlapping systems; its a set of questions that we are or are not allowed to ask about what is important and what evidence is acceptable to demonstrate that we are living our purpose. As our authors point out:

Schools throughout America are filled with...students who have been acculturated to devalue thinking, to feel uneasy about in-depth analysis, and to view anything other than rapid coverage of the curriculum as wasting time. These students are frequently successful in school. They study, complete their assignments, pass their tests, and receive good grades. Yet, these are not
meaningful victories. They are the victories of form over substance, of superficiality over engagement, of coverage over depth. (pg 119–120)

Weighing the challenges facing our students today along with the seeming futility of raising test scores, it should be clear that chasing traditional measures has not just failed us at great cost but also distracted us from what matters in education, and it’s time we stop comparing ourselves to other nations if we are to start building an educational system that serves everyone. For 30 years we’ve put teachers and students into narrow, standardized boxes with very little to show for it. So how can “The Case for Constructivism” actually help us blur the supposedly defined edges of today’s educational debates around “effectiveness”, “outcomes”, and “what works”? How can oft misunderstood and maligned constructivist-informed classroom practices support human-centered pedagogy, and what would it benefit us all to do so?

To begin, it’s important to understand that the part-to-whole value system of school designed to support what the authors call “mimetic” thinking is not the same as one that supports a deep, conceptual whole-to-part understanding. “If students can be trained to repeat specific procedures and chunks of information,” they write, “then they are viewed as ‘having learned’” (pg. 16). In a mimetic classroom, those students who can best imitate understanding by committing disconnected chunks of information to short-term memory and repeating
them back on test day are rewarded with praise and grades. Assessment is as separate from teaching as it is from learning and it’s expected that these isolated, individual performances are where students are to show their understanding. However, in a constructivist space student learning is an ongoing process, a conversation weaving together formal and informal assessment, observation, and feedback to help learners “internalize and reshape, or transform, new information” (pg. 15). Drawing on the work of Jackson and Gardner, our authors write that “deep understanding occurs when the presence of new information prompts the emergence or enhancement of cognitive structures that enable us to rethink our prior ideas” (pg. 15); or more simply, when students have demonstrated a change in their behavior as the result of the change in their thinking.

“Differentiating between teaching and assessment is both unnecessary and counterproductive” (pg. 97). It is this focus on learning as a continual, learner-centered process rather than a collection of mimetic performance events which distinguishes constructivist teaching from traditional practice, and — it turns out — is better for learning as “emphasis on performance usually results in little recall of concepts over time, while emphasis on learning generates long-term understanding.” Capturing learning as a process usually leads informed adults to seek a range of qualitative and quantitative sources in determining student progress, and rarely for the sole purpose of assigning a grade, recognizing that the cognitive structure of each student is perfectly unique and influenced by too many variables to be precisely distilled into a particular number out of one hundred. Instead, constructivist teachers work alongside students to help curate a representative sample of their performance and progress over time to give otherwise hidden cognitive processes shape and form outside the brain. We usually give this kind of alchemy a banal name like a portfolio, but the power of holding a curated and cultivated volume of student work and reflections cannot be underestimated. It makes learning self-evident.

By honoring learning as an imperfect yet ongoing process under constant revision, these approaches are sometimes perceived as messy, and that messiness — while honest — is frequently used to argue against constructivist methods of instruction and assessment. However, a mimetic approach to education is as dishonest as constructivism is messy, and it is far easier to sublimate the idiosyncratic cognitive structures of our children into a number that can more readily be understood, and therefore managed, by those most distant from them. Brooks and Brooks write that “the mimetic approach to education is too compelling for many educators to give up. It is amenable to easily performed and widely accepted measurement, management, and accountability procedures. This approach has long dominated educational thinking, and, therefore, policymaking.” (pg. 16)

Further, when students are acknowledged as active constructors and given the appropriate autonomy to “follow trails of interest, to make connections, to reformulate new ideas, and to reach unique conclusions”, many of the elaborate behaviorist incentives that are used to manage learning become unnecessary and the strict disciplinary silos we use to divide content become irrelevant.

Designing, thinking, changing, evaluating — most particularly in response to a felt need — create interest and energy”, and that interest and energy is the fuel of additional learning. Brooks and Brooks argue that learners finding their own problems, rather than just answering the same problems posed to all students by a teacher, not only engenders greater energy and interest but also fosters commitment and engagement with the world outside of school: “Coming to know one’s world is a function of caring about one’s world. Caring about one’s world is fostered by communities of learners involved in trying to answer similar, but not necessarily identical, problems. The energy necessary for construction of problem solutions demands commitment. Commitment, in turn, emanates from construction. (pg. 30)

This might be the most fundamental aspect of constructivist classrooms: adults modeling for children that learning is not merely a schoolhouse collection of correct answers but that the world itself is full of complex problems.
with multiple perspectives and interpretations that merit our thoughtful consideration. Accessing and iterating on those problems is an education in itself and will necessarily lead to learning even if, as many adults find out far too late, they don’t always lead to clear answers. And these are often the problems most worth pursuing:

*Every day, millions of students enter school wanting to learn, hoping to be stimulated, engaged, and treated well, and hoping to find meaning in what they do. And every day that we, as educators, stimulate and challenge our students to focus their minds on meaningful tasks, to think about important issues, and to construct new understandings of their world, we — and they — achieve meaningful victory.* (pg 119–120)

For more information about how to put constructivist ideas into practice through Project/Problem-Based Learning, Portfolios, and how to connect to a global network of educators helping students pursue the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals, see the following links below:

- **S3: E18: Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals to the Classroom with Dr. Jennifer Williams, Julia Fliss, and Nick Covington**
  This episode is all about the Sustainable Development Goals, with some specific questions surrounding their implementation. If you’re not familiar, the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 and consist of 17 major problems the world aims to solve by 2030.
- **“Cutting Content to Make Room For Learning”:** This ‘Economic Engagement Project’ is part of what I would like to see as a model of education that is in and of the world rather than preparation for it, so it’s important to communicate to students how we are going to use the time we have together as an opportunity to think and grow and learn collectively from and for each other.
- **Evidence Journal for Alternative Assessment:** This resource, which is explained in detail on our *YouTube* channel, provides a way to validate self-assessment and incorporate gradeless learning into even the most traditional classroom.
The End of Homework by Etta Kralovec and John Buell offers a succinct and researched account of why homework does little to actually improve academic performance, and instead hurts a family’s overall well-being. Kralovec and Buell analyze and dissect homework studies over the last few decades, finding that most research supports their claims or, at-best, makes dubious claims on the affects of homework. Although written in 2000, The End of Homework makes arguments that are only strengthened today: homework is discriminatory toward the poor (and the wealth gap has grown), it separates families from their children (and families work longer hours, and homework assigned has increased), and academic results are mixed (and recent studies reflect this.)

At Human Restoration Project, one of the core systemic changes we suggest is the elimination of homework. Throughout this piece, I will include more recent research studies that add to this work. I believe that the adverse affects of homework are so strong that any homework assigned, outside of minor catching up or incredibly niche cases, does more harm than good.

Summarized within The End of Homework, as well as developmental psychologists, sociologists, and educators, are the core reasons why homework is not beneficial:

**Homework is Inequitable**

*In the most practical terms, calls for teachers to assign more homework and for parents to provide a quiet, well-lit place for the child to study must always be considered in the context of the parents’ education, income, available time, and job security. For many of our fellow citizens, jobs have become less secure and less well paid over the course of the last two decades.*

**Americans work the longest hours of any nation.** Individuals in 2006 worked 11 hours longer than their counterparts in 1979. In 2020, 70% of children live in households where both parents work. And the United States is the only country in the industrial world without guaranteed family leave. The results are staggering: 90% of women and 95% of men report work-family conflict. According to the Center for American Progress, “the United States today has the most family-hostile public policy in the developed world due to a long-standing political impasse.”

As a result, parents have much less time to connect with their children. This is not a call to a return to traditional family roles, or even to have stay-at-home parents. Rather, our occupational society is structured inadequately to allow for the use of homework, and Americans must change how labor laws demand their time. For those who work in entry level positions, such as customer service and cashiers, there is an average 240% turnover per year due to lack of pay, poor conditions, work-life balance, and mismanagement. Family incomes continue to decline for lower- and middle-class Americans, leaving more parents to work increased hours or multiple jobs. In other words, parents, especially poor parents, have less opportunities to spend time with their children, let alone foster academic “gains” via homework.

In an effort to increase engagement in homework, teachers have been encouraged to create interesting, creative assignments. Although this has good intentions, rigorous homework with increased complexity places more impetus on parents. As Gary Natrillo, an initial proponent of creative homework, stated later:

‘…not only was homework being assigned as suggested by all the ‘experts,’ but the teacher was obviously taking the homework seriously, making it challenging instead of routine and checking it each day and giving feedback. We were enveloped by the nightmare of near total implementation of the reform recommendations pertaining to homework...More creative homework tasks are a mixed blessing on the receiving end. On the one hand, they, of course, lead to higher engagement and interest for children and their parents. On the
other hand, they require one to be well rested, a special condition of mind not often available to working parents…”

Time is a luxury to most Americans. With increased working hours, in conjunction with extreme levels of stress, many Americans don’t have the necessary mindset to adequately supply children with the attention to detail for complex homework. As Kralovec and Buell state,

To put it plainly, I have discovered that after a day at work, the commute home, dinner preparations, and the prospect of baths, goodnight stories, and my own work ahead, there comes a time beyond which I cannot sustain my enthusiasm for the math brain teaser or the creative story task.

Americans are some of the most stressed people in the world. Mass shootings, health care affordability, discrimination, sexual harassment, climate change, the presidential election, and literally: staying informed have caused roughly 70% of people to report moderate or extreme stress, with increased rates for people of color, LGBTQIA Americans, and other discriminated groups. 90% of high schoolers and college students report moderate or higher stress, with half reporting depression and lack of energy and motivation.

Perhaps the solution to academic achievement in America isn’t doubling down on test scores or increasing the work students do at home, but solving the underlying systemic inequities: the economic and discriminatory problems that plague our society? Kralovec and Buell note,

Citing the low test scores of American students has become a favorite cocktail...
party game. However, some scholars have offered a more nuanced explanation for the poor showing by U.S. students in international academic performance comparisons, suggesting that it may have more to do with high levels of childhood poverty and a lack of support for families in the United States than with low academic standards, shorter school days, and fewer hours spent on homework.

Finland, frequently cited as a model education system, enjoys some of the highest standards of living in the world:

- Finland’s life expectancy is 81.8 years, compared to the US’ 78.7 years and a notable difference exists in the US between rich and poor. Further, America’s life expectancy is declining, the only industrialized country with this statistic.
- Finland’s health care is rated best in the world and only spends $3,078 per capita, compared to $8,047 in the US.
- Finland has virtually no homelessness, compared to 500,000 homeless in the United States.
- Finland has the lowest inequality levels in the EU, compared to the United States with one of the highest inequality levels in the world. Research has demonstrated that countries with lower inequality levels are happier and healthier.

Outside of just convincing you to flat-out move to Finland, these statistics reflect that potentially — instead of investing hundreds of millions of dollars in initiatives to increase national test scores, such as homework strategies, curriculum changes, and nationwide “raising the bar” initiatives — the US should invest in programs that universally help our daily lives, such as universal healthcare and housing. The solution to test scores is rooted in solving America’s underlying inequitable society — shining a light on our core issues — rather than making teachers solve all of our community’s problems.

But Wait, Despite All This... Does Homework Even Work!?

‘Extensive classroom research of ‘time on task’ and international comparisons of year-round time for study suggest that additional homework might promote U.S. students’ achievement.’ This written statement by some of the top professionals in the field of homework research raises some difficult questions. More homework might promote student achievement? Are all our blood, sweat, and tears at the kitchen table over homework based on something that merely might be true? Our belief in the value of homework is akin to faith. We assume that it fosters a love of learning, better study habits, improved attitudes toward school, and greater self-discipline; we believe that better teachers assign more homework and that one sign of a good school is a good, enforced homework policy.

Numerous studies of homework reflect an inconsistent result. Not only does homework rarely demonstrate large, if any, academic gains for testing, there are many negative impacts on the family that are often ignored.

- Countries that assigned the least amount of homework: Denmark, Czech Republic, had higher test scores than those with the most amount of homework: Iran, Thailand.
- Quality of instruction, motivation, and ability are all correlated with student success in school. Yet homework may be marginal or counterproductive.
- Homework was found to have no meaningful affect on achievement.
- Of all homework assigned, homework only saw marginal increases in math and science standardized testing, and had no bearing on grades.
- Homework added pressure and societal stress to those who already experienced the same at home, causing a further divide in academic performance (due to lack of time and financial stress.)

By bringing schoolwork home, the well-intentioned belief of promoting equity through high standards has the adverse affect of causing further inequity. Private and preparatory schools are notorious for extreme levels of homework assignment. Yet, many progressive schools assign no homework and achieve the same levels of college and career success. Again, the biggest predictor of college success has nothing to do with rigorous preparation, and everything to do with family income levels. 77% of students from high income families graduated from a highly competitive college, whereas 9% of students from low income families did the same.
School curriculum obsession in homework is likely rooted in studies that demonstrate increased test scores as a result of assigned homework. The End of Homework deciphers this phenomena:

Cooper’s work provides us with one more example of a problem that routinely bedevils all the sciences: the relationship between correlation and causality. If A and B happen simultaneously, we do not know whether A causes B or B causes A, or whether both phenomena occur casually together or are individually determined by another set of variables...Thus far, most studies in this area have amounted to little more than crude correlations that cannot justify the sweeping conclusions some have derived from them.

If other countries demonstrate educational success (albeit measured through standardized testing) with little to no assigned homework and limited school hours, shouldn’t we take a step back and analyze the system as a whole, rather than figure out better homework schemes?

A Reflection of Neoliberal Society
According to New York State’s Teacher of the Year in 1990:

“[Schools] separate parents and children from vital interaction with each other and from true curiosity about each other’s lives. Schools stifle family originality by appropriating the critical time needed for any sound idea of family to develop — then they blame the family for its family to be a family. It’s like a malicious person lifting a photograph from the developing chemicals too early, then pronouncing the photographer incompetent.’

Education often equates learning with work. I have to stop myself from behaving like an economics analyst: telling students to quit “wasting time”, stating that the purpose of the lesson is useful for future earnings, seeing everything as prep for college and career (and college is ultimately just for more earnings in a career), and making blanket assumptions that those who aren’t motivated will ultimately never contribute to society, taking on “low levels” of work that “aren’t as important” as other positions.

Since the nineteenth century, developmental psychology has been moving away from the notion that children are nothing more or less than miniature adults. In suggesting that children need to learn to deal with adult levels of pressure, we risk doing them untold damage. By this logic, the schoolyard shootings of recent years may be likened to ‘disgruntled employee’ rampages.

This mentality is unhealthy and unjust. The purpose of education should be to develop purpose. People live happier and healthier lives as a result of pursuing and developing a core purpose. Some people’s purpose is related to their line of work, but there is not necessarily a connection. However, the primary goal stated by districts, states, and the national government of the education system is to make “productive members of society.” When we double down on economic principles to raise complex individuals, it’s no wonder we’re seeing such horrific statistics related to childhood.

Further, the consistent pressure to produce for economic gain raises generations of young people to believe that wealth is a measurement of success and that specific lines of work create happiness. Teachers and parents are told to make their children “work hard” for future success and develop “grit.” Although grit is an important indicator of overcoming obstacles, it is not developed by enforcing grit through authoritarian classrooms or meaningless, long tasks. In fact, an argument could be made that many Americans accept their dramatically poor work-life balance and lack of access to needs such as affordable health care by being brought up in a society that rewards neoliberal tendencies of “working through it” to “eventually achieve happiness.”

Kralovec and Buell state,

Many of us would question whether our fighting with our children for twelve years about homework could possibly foster good habits. In contrast, participating in the decisions of the household and collaborating with others on common chores, from cooking to cleaning to doing routine repairs, are important life skills that also require good work habits. For many children, these habits are never learned because homework gets in the way of that work.

Americans have more difficulty than ever raising children, with increasing demands of time and
rising childcare costs. Children often need to “pick up the slack” and help taking care of the home. In fact, children with chores show completely positive universal growth across the board. When teachers provide more and more homework, they take away from the parents’ ability to structure their household according to their needs. As written in The End of Homework,

Most of us find we do not have enough time with our children to teach them these things; our ‘teaching’ time is instead taken up with school-mandated subjects. We often wonder if we wouldn’t have less tension in our society over prayer in schools if our children had more time for religious instruction at home and for participation in church activities. When school is the virtually exclusive center of the child’s educational and even moral universe, it is not surprising that so many parents should find school agendas (with which they may or may not agree) a threat to their very authority and identity.

Of course, this is not to say that it is all the teacher’s fault. Educators face immense pressure to carry out governmental/school policies that place test scores at the forefront. Many of these policies require homework, and an educator’s future employment is centered on enacting these changes:

As more academic demands are placed on teachers, homework can help lengthen the school day and thus ensure ‘coverage’ — that is, the completion of the full curriculum that each teacher is supposed to cover during the school year...This in itself places pressure on teachers to create meaningful homework and often to assign large amounts of it so that the students’ parents will think the teacher is rigorous and the school has high academic standards. Extensive homework is frequently linked in our minds to high standards.

Therefore, there’s a connection to be made between “work”-life balance of children and the people who are tasked with teaching them. 8% of the teacher workforce leaves every year, many concerned with work-life balance. Perhaps teachers see an increased desire to “work” students in their class and at home due to the pressures they face in their own occupation?

We have little opportunity to enjoy recreation, community events, local politics, or family life. Our diminished possibilities in this regard in turn reinforce our reliance on wages and the workplace. And even the family time that remains after the demands of work and commuting are met is increasingly structured by the requirements of the workplace and school.

The more we equate work with learning, and the more we accept a school’s primary purpose to prepare workers, the less we actually succeed at promoting academics. Instead, we bolster the neoliberal tendencies of the United States to work hard, yet comparably to other countries’ lifestyle gains, achieve little. The United States must examine the underlying inequities of peoples’ lives, rather than focus on increasing schools’ workloads and lessening children’s free time for mythical academic gains that lead to little change. Teacher preparation programs and popular authors need to stop promoting “interesting and fun ways to teach ‘x’!” and propose systemic changes that radically change the way education is done, including systemic changes to society at large. Only then will the United States actually see improved livelihoods and a better education system for all.
NEW RELEASE: THE NEW HUMAN-CENTRIC PRIMER!

As we reflect, grow, and evolve our work, it’s incredibly important that we choose the best possible authors and outlets. As we reflect, grow, and evolve our work, it’s incredibly important that we choose the best possible authors and outlets.

The Primer for Progressive Education is meant to outline HRP’s core mission: to change systems rather than improve upon strategies. We are in need of a drastic overhaul to the education system, a change that will only happen when we rethink schooling altogether. Our Primer outlines 25 different systems that outline progressive education.

You can view the full version of the Primer, for free, on our website.

The Human Restoration Project supports progressive educators in building systematic change within schools. By providing free resources, professional development, and materials, we can form a coalition of like-minded educators who can revolutionize the education system from the ground up.

We appreciate the sharing of our resources. This booklet, as well as all our materials, are available for free and can be modified and shared with attribution.
PROGRESSIVE VS. NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION

Some strategies that are commonly associated with education do not fit the underlying problems in the school system. Progressive practices are differentiated because they're not about acronyms or buzzwords, but are based on research-backed educational ideas that have entered for centuries.

**neoliberal**
- a well-planned game that engages students in course content
- changing the grading system to 1-4, rather than A-F
- practicing mindfulness to get students through the school day
- setting aside an hour each week to support student interests
- setting aside "nice to know" from "need to know"
- supporting relationship building to control one's classroom
- hooking students with pop culture references
- always being positive, energetic, and optimistic
- controlling student movements to moderate the classroom
- finding ways to pair projects to content standards
- seeing one's classroom content as unimportantly important
- visioning oneself as a savior to rescue students
- believing an education is needed to get ahead in society

**progressive**
- a project that motivates by impacting the community
- eliminating grading practices and shifting to narrative assessment
- supporting the opt-out movement for standardized testing
- revising the schedule to place student interests at the forefront
- contesting core class projects and learning on self-determination
- supporting relationship building to connect with students
- helping students determine their unique path to purpose
- regulating one's behavior while not supporting tons of positivity
- letting students freely move around the room
- finding ways to co-create student-centered projects
- recognizing one's classroom content as a means toward future motivation
- valuing the immense knowledge in a student's lived experience
- fighting the narrative that an education is competitive

Henry Giroux
1942-Present
- teachers as intellectuals
- 1988: pedagogy and the politics of hope
- 2011: on critical pedagogy

Bell Hooks
1952-Present
- Ain't I a woman?
- 1981: teaching to transgress
- 1994: teaching community: a pedagogy of hope
- 2003: hooks, a feminist and social activist, wrote on the oppressive nature of schooling and the ways that race, capitalism, and gender affect the classroom. Her work helped support educators in understanding that an inclusive space means to reality.

Alfie Kohn
1957-Present
- punished by rewards
- 1989: the school our children deserve
- 1999: feel bad education

**HOW DO I DO THIS?**

There's not a silver bullet. There's not a specific teaching strategy. Every school and classroom is different. Yet there is general advice we can offer:

**Systematic Change Takes Time**
Students have been conditioned for years to expect extrinsic rewards, to respect authoritarianism, and to follow the teacher's path. To see these systems, it's expected that things won't go as planned. In fact, it can take weeks, months, even years to see the change that progressive pedagogy brings. Our goal is not to give up at the first point of failure, and to push forward with what research supports. In order for educators to understand these changes, they must have a chance to experience them, grow, and develop. Trust the process.

**Financing Doesn't Work**
Small changes won't be enough to transform the livelihood of the classroom. Any system that helps students can be worthwhile, but systemic changes — such as gradeless classrooms — won't see any benefit if only certain assignments are utilized or if an equivalent assessment is used. A full embrace of human-centered practice is needed.

**These Practices Aren’t Easy**
As bell hooks states, "Givens that our educational institutions are deeply invested in a teaching system, teachers are more rewarded when they do not teach against the grain." Then we work against the status quo. We will encounter adversity. However, to go along with the status quo is unsustainable. There's a certain level of revolutionary thinking that goes into being a progressive educator.

**Take Notes**
Progressive education isn't about a one-size-fits-all methodology. We must take action, see how they work out, and realize. After spending a lot of time on something new, we must reflect on the practice and find ways to normalize the practice. Most important to our work is our mindset — do we know why we're doing what we're doing, and does it align with our purpose of education?

**Build a Coalition**
For many reasons, not all administrators or colleagues will support this style of education. However, students and parents who are properly informed will understand the value of research-backed, progressive methods. Taking time to explain each practice, with various articles to back oneself up, is needed to ensure success. Finding other teachers, either in one's building or online, will help you with problem-solving and, more importantly, morale in such a difficult transition.