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Artifacts of Schooling

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INTRODUCTION

While this edition of the Children at Risk's Journal of Applied Research on Children (JARC) is ostensibly about the impact of built environments on children, I suspect it will inevitably address other issues as well. This colorful diagram illustrates the nature of our challenge. The elements of schooling are inextricably/integrally linked in defining the environment students and teachers experience—impact any one of these and you invariably impact them all.



Consider the recent funding cuts imposed on schools. Less funds meant fewer teachers which meant larger class sizes, which made classrooms crowded/too small, and made it difficult to fund needed technology, which constrained access to learning resources, which made it hard to achieve all the learning stipulated by the tests in the time allotted.

Consider the technology being used in the world outside our schools—and by our students in their homes. That technology could allow us to individualize teaching and learning. Software could be adapted for each student's learning styles. Students could work/learn at their own-pace. Teachers could become facilitators, mentors, guides. But if we used technology in that manner, fixed periods of time marked by bells on agrarian calendars, and classrooms 'owned' by teachers and arranged by disciplines/departments would make no sense.

What the diagram says is that we must be mindful of the whole school environment whenever we address any one of these elements. But, consider that in most school districts, each of these elements is a department headed by an Assistant Superintendent and these often function separately in silos.

So while I am an architect, I've a deep passion for education—and while I'm always mindful of the built environment, I will regularly stray into all the related areas that impact teaching and learning.



I'm a strong believer in Bloom's taxonomy and the notion that 'stand and deliver' is not a very effective way to help students learn—to develop higher order thinking skills. Given the way us architects are educated (project based learning since the 19th Century), I believe in putting learners to work in exploring issues and solving problems—and thereby developing skills they can apply in other contexts throughout their lives. And so, the intention here is to put my readers to work as well. My objective is not to tell you what to think about our schools, but to raise issues and questions which will challenge you to reach your own conclusions.

ANCIENT ARTIFACTS SPEAK TO US

As an architect who has traveled extensively to experience the architecture of many centuries, I've learned a great deal about history from observing what people built and come to appreciate the idea of artifacts. Webster defines an artifact as "any object made by human workmanship".

We're accustomed to thinking of artifacts as something ancient—something archeologists find and interpret—like in Pompeii. Archeologists dig up stuff and conclude all sorts of things about the people who made them, who lived/died there, etc.

But I contend that buildings and objects do not have to be centuries old to function as artifacts and to tell us things about what their makers thought, valued, did, etc. I think our cities and buildings, art, music, cars, clothes, gizmos, etc. have always done that—and are currently doing that to live and kicking people—like us—not to mention those who may dig us up in the distant future.

Do we really think about what our cities and buildings are saying about us—and as an architect with a particular interest in education, I wonder if we think about what our schools are saying now to current students? I wonder if we think as we design schools today about what they will say to others who will see and use them for decades into the future.



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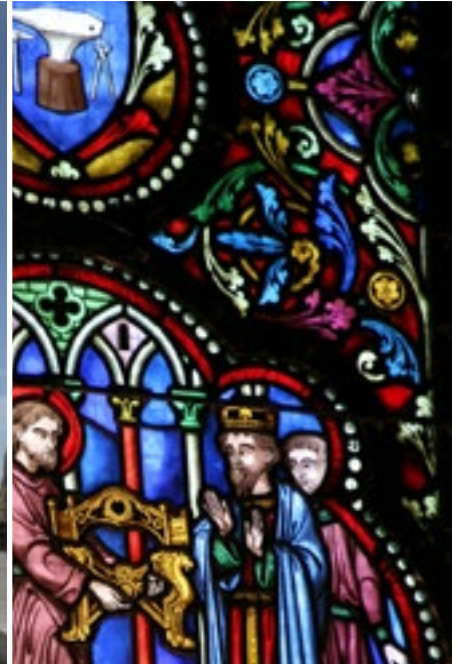
BUILDINGS SPEAK TO US

Consider these images of the Amiens Cathedral and the retail residential structures in the foreground. Amiens is the largest gothic cathedral in France—an astonishing place—any doubts about what was or is important here?

Cathedrals carried very clear messages/information in their extraordinary art—sculpted facades, stained glass, etc. Finding the artifacts here is easy because they were intended to tell stories—to speak to us.



Wikipedia



RESTAURANTS, CLOTHES SPEAK TO US

Clearly we think about what places/ spaces say to us in restaurants where the ambiance is such a big part of the experience—like the three star Tour d’Argent in Paris with its roof top view of Notre Dame. People not only like what the place says to them and their stomachs, but what it says about them—they can spend several hundred dollars a head for dinner.

Clothing speaks volumes—a monk’s simple robe sends a really different message than Louis 14th’s opulence—and both were very intentional. Louis’ red heels were a symbol of royalty—showing some leg and wearing garters are another matter.

You can walk down the sidewalk today and see clothing speak on behalf of the folks wearing it—from baggy pants and colorful underwear (thank goodness for the underwear!) to pinstripe suits. AND, we form instant opinions about the wearers of these clothes the minute we see them.



Wikipedia



www.drestailor.com



Wikipedia



news.softpedia.com/

APPLE'S VISUAL MESSAGE

Clearly Apple thinks about what their equipment and stores say—both outside and inside their stores—and everything they make from computers to iPhones, iPods and iPads, etc. supports the image.



Wikipedia

WHAT DO OUR SCHOOLS SAY?

But do we really think about/worry about what our schools say to kids? Consider the percentage of our population that studies/works each day in schools. Consider that school districts are often the largest property/building owners and employers in our communities. By just about any measure, schools are important places—and they say a lot about what we think—but what do they say?



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ARE SCHOOLS FOR ADULTS OR KIDS?

Schools are planned around adults and what they do—under the assumption that if all the adults do good stuff—everything will be fine for the kids. So we worry first and most about the adults—from the principal to the teachers to the school nurse to the librarian, coach, band director, counselors, the crossing guards—and a bunch of others.

Every teacher wants to own their classroom—be the only teacher to use the space. ‘Floating’ is a four letter word—even for spelling teachers. Yet middle and high school students typically have nothing of their own except a locker (and many no longer get lockers) and they float from classroom to classroom, subject to subject every time a bell rings every day for seven years.

How much do we think about the messages our schools and schooling send to the kids who are required by law to attend them for thirteen years—PK-12—who for the most part have no choice about where they go—how or what they learn? Are we saying that schooling can be/should be interesting, fun, relevant, engaging for kids?



CONFUSING MESSAGES?

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What do we say to kids when they look like these girls and they are linked to their friends and the world— AND there's an entertainment center in their den that looks this—AND when the kid rides to school in a technically sophisticated car like this—



Wikipedia

BUT they live in a traditional brand new house in the suburbs that looks like this—and it's clad in styrofoam with a 'stucco' coating—



THOMAS JEFFERSON?

—AND when they attend a school that looks like this—only Thomas Jefferson didn't design it and it wasn't built in 1772—and it opened 2 years ago and the columns are fiberglass.



Wikipedia

What are the things and the architecture in these kid's lives telling them about the stuff that really interests them—what is it telling them about their future? Are these things posing serious contradictions? Are they confusing? Are these supportive of their lives as students? OR are they just irrelevant stuff to be ignored, worked around, and kissed off as much as possible? Is that what we aspire to when we create new buildings of any type—much less schools?

What do we say to kids who dress like this, but go to schools that look like Monticello—shouldn't the curls and lacy dress be the school uniform?



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A DIGITAL KID'S DESK?

What does it say to the kid with all the gizmos and internet access to the world when she can choose the French style Bell Noir desk on which to put her laptop? —OR the Mission desk? —OR the Santa Cruz desk? Are these juxtapositions just funny or perverse? What are we saying to kids?



SCHOOLS- WHICH CENTURY?

What do we say to kids who were born into and embrace a digital world when we put them in classrooms where technology means an overhead projector and TV or a Smart Board—Where computers are relegated to a lab down the hall or roll around on carts? Where kids can only use them at certain times and under constant supervision? What does that tell kids about the world around them when they see their parents working in places where every single person has multiple digital devices as surely as they have a desk and chair.



At this date, we are still operating and building such schools—and in the process, we are forcing kids to power-down and log-off each day as they leave home and head for their schools. Does that seem right?

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DIGITAL KIDS IN A PAPER WORLD

What do we say to a kid who is wired to the world when we require him to sit in a room listening to a teacher writing on the wall? Is there a giant clash of technologies and generations here?

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What do we say to kids with iPads who have instant access to info anywhere/anytime, when they go to a school library with a small collection of old books zealously protected from kids by a librarian?

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SCHOOL CHANGES SINCE 1937?

What do we say to kids and parents when the world changes and our schools do not? How do we convince kids, or anyone, that these schools are preparing them for their futures? How many of us of went to or can even remember high schools that were significantly different from today's schools from an instructional perspective. This is my high school—in 2009, I went back for my 50th reunion—it was remarkably unchanged—particularly considering how different current kids are and how much the world around the school has changed.



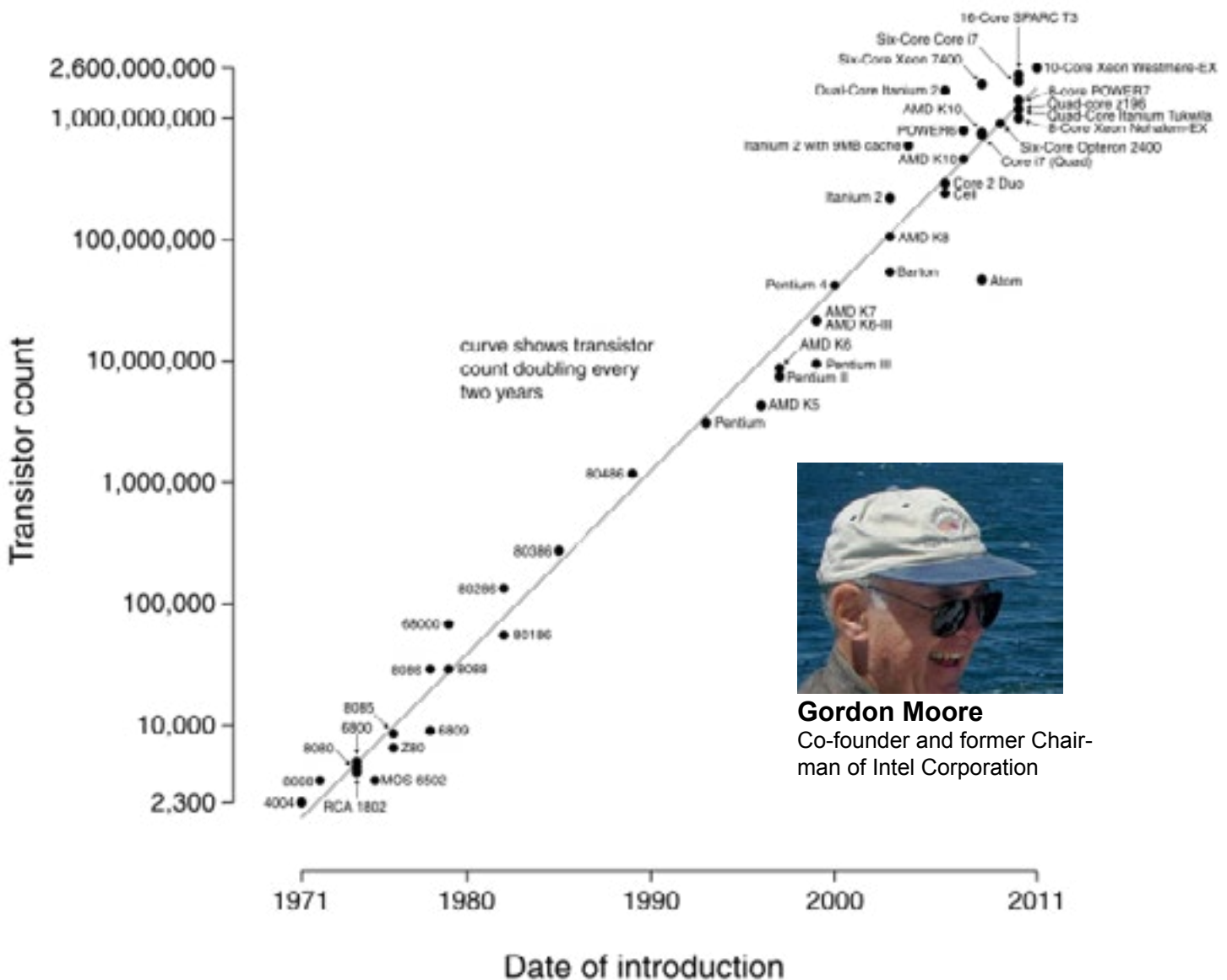
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PACE OF CHANGE-MOORE'S LAW

What do we say to the kids currently going to a school unchanged since 1937 while they're in a world that is following Moore's Law—when the power of computers is doubling over and over again every 18-24 months and the costs are going down—and the world is changing exponentially with them.

Yet we take great pride in making schools that are permanent and durable—that have terrazo floors and concrete block walls that are intended to remain unchanged for decades. But it also means that the facility cannot easily or quickly or economically be modified to respond the changes in teaching and learning. Office and retail buildings are constructed with the full recognition that while their exterior shell and interior core elements will be permanent, their interior spaces will change significantly many times over the life of the building. Why should office and stores be more adaptive to change than schools?

Microprocessor Transistor Counts 1971-2011 & Moore's Law



Gordon Moore
Co-founder and former Chairman of Intel Corporation

ATTRACTING KIDS?

What do we say to kids who live in a world with shopping malls and supermarkets that work really hard to hyper stimulate every sense—that try to attract people—even kids—who really want them to come—even to enjoy themselves—when we send them to schools that numb every sense?

Why do schools have to be like this? Do we think schooling is some sort of medicinal process to be accepted/endured OR do we think kids will destroy anything more interesting OR that if the environment is more interesting that it will distract kids from their learning OR do we really think about any of that stuff and just try to make things that are kid proof?



WHAT DO WE SAY TO TAXPAYERS?

What do new schools say to voters when after they've agreed to pay off bonds for 30 years into the future—we plan those schools around instructional ideas from 30 years or more in the past? What does that say to parents and kids about making schools for the future--and getting great value for the tax funds spent?

How is it that voters and parents seem to think that schooling and school environments that worked for them a generation or more earlier will work for their kids in the future?



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LOOK TO THE FUTURE OR THE PAST?

Why do we think these modern structures in very old cities were strokes of architectural genius—when we think it's OK for a new high school in a modern city that is supposed to prepare kids for their futures to look like this? Are we being respectful to either the past we are imitating or to the kids and their futures? What is the message we are sending to the kids and communities?



Wikipedia



WHAT DO CLASSROOMS SAY?

What do classrooms say? That—

- Each teacher works independently within their room. They 'own' their room—do not float.
- It's up to the students to make connections between subjects
- Instruction is planned for groups or classes of students—not individuals
- Students move/float period by period from teacher to teacher, room to room, subject to subject, hour by hour every day for the all the years they are in secondary school.
- Stand/deliver, park/bark, sit/get will be the primary mode of instruction.
- Teaching materials will be primarily paper based—that digital materials/devices will not have a major role.
- Dialogue between teachers and individual students will be very limited.
- Assessment will be primarily via written exams

Classrooms are the 'basic building block' of almost every school. Are they saying things to students that make schooling more engaging?



WHAT DO LIBRARIES SAY?

What do libraries say about what is/is not important for teaching and learning? State regulations for K-12 facilities, stipulate the size of libraries in terms of floor area and sometimes the minimum number of volumes to be provided for schools of varied size—the larger the enrollment, the larger the library and its collection. But what will archeologists think when they dig up some of our school libraries and find that the library for a school serving 3000 students is much larger than the library serving 1000 students? Will they imagine that we thought individual students in the smaller school needed to know only 1/3rd of the history, facts, etc. that students in the larger school needed to know? Will they imagine that the small library had 1 of each of the critical books students needed and the larger school library had 3 copies of each of the same books. OR Will the archeologists be sufficiently thorough in their excavations to be amazed that we never thought about the question?



TEA K-12 LIBRARY FACILITY STANDARDS

- For schools with capacity 100 or less- minimum 1400 SF
- For schools with capacity 101 to 500- minimum of 1400 plus 4 SF/student in excess of 100
- For schools with capacity 501-2000- minimum of 3000 plus 3 SF/student in excess of 500
- For schools with capacity more than 2001- minimum of 7500 plus 2 SF/student in excess of 2000

STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT

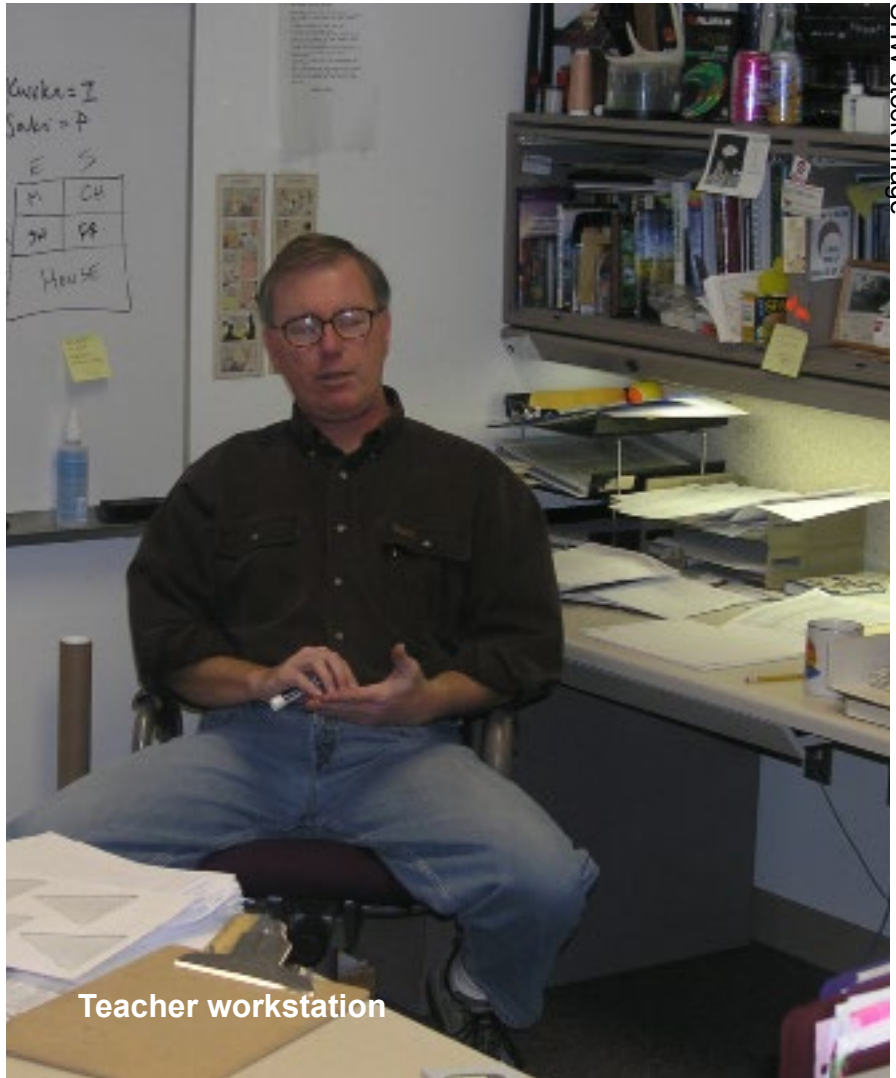
What do we say to kids when we have windowless classrooms—even entire schools without windows in any instructional spaces? Years ago there was an argument that windows and views to the outside would distract students from their studies. Yet today we argue that natural light is good for our health and that if it is properly admitted, it can reduce energy consumption and benefit the environment. And if the kids are really engaged in their studies, see them as relevant to their lives, and are motivated to pursue their work, they are not distracted by natural light or rich complex environments. Kids and adults can read and study in airports and restaurants and all sorts of places that aren't necessarily quiet or still—but are really interesting and stimulating. Could we make schools more stimulating and have kids more engaged?



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PLACES TO WORK?

What will archeologist think when they dig up a school and can't find any clear evidence about where we put kids? They'll find lots of classrooms with teacher's names on the doors and desks with their stuff in them. But at best, all they will find for kids are lockers and many schools don't provide those any more. Who does the important work of learning? Shouldn't students have a small place in the school that is their base--where they can put their stuff, do their work?



Teacher workstation

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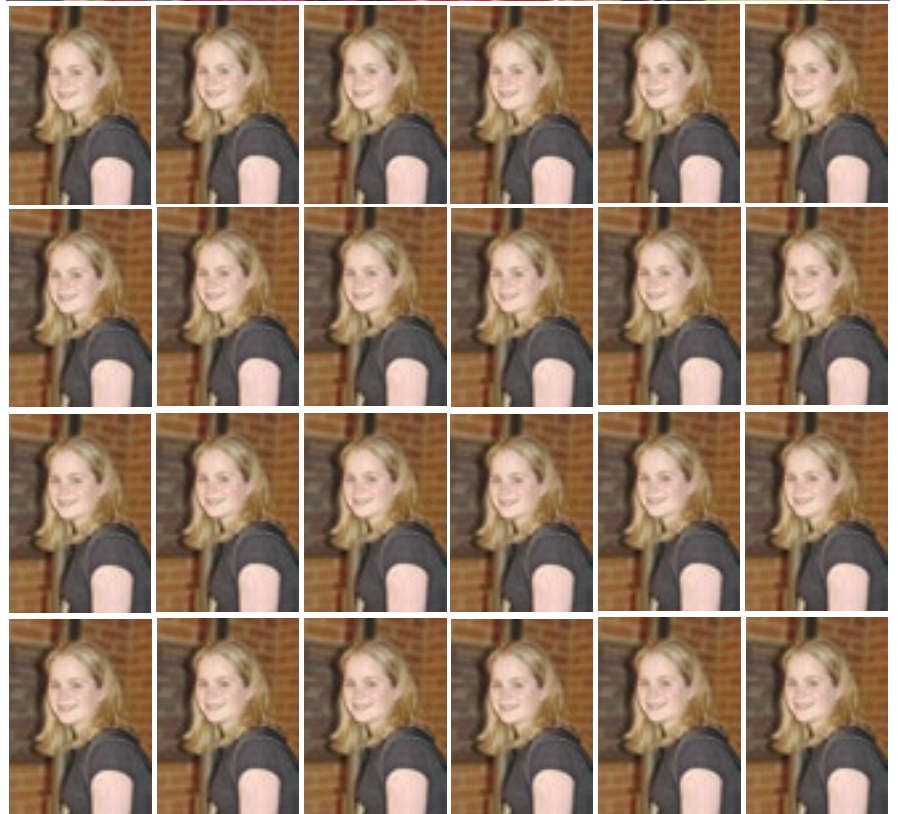
Student workstation

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SHW stock image

CLASSES OR INDIVIDUALS?

What do we say to kids when we know how wonderfully diverse they are, how they learn in different ways at different paces, yet in our industrial age schools, we treat them as if they were all identical? What do we say to kids when we try to teach every student in the same manner with the same instructional materials in the same amount of time in every subject every day—and get the very diverse outcomes one should expect from such diverse kids? Did we not succeed in our own learning about Howard Gardner’s studies?



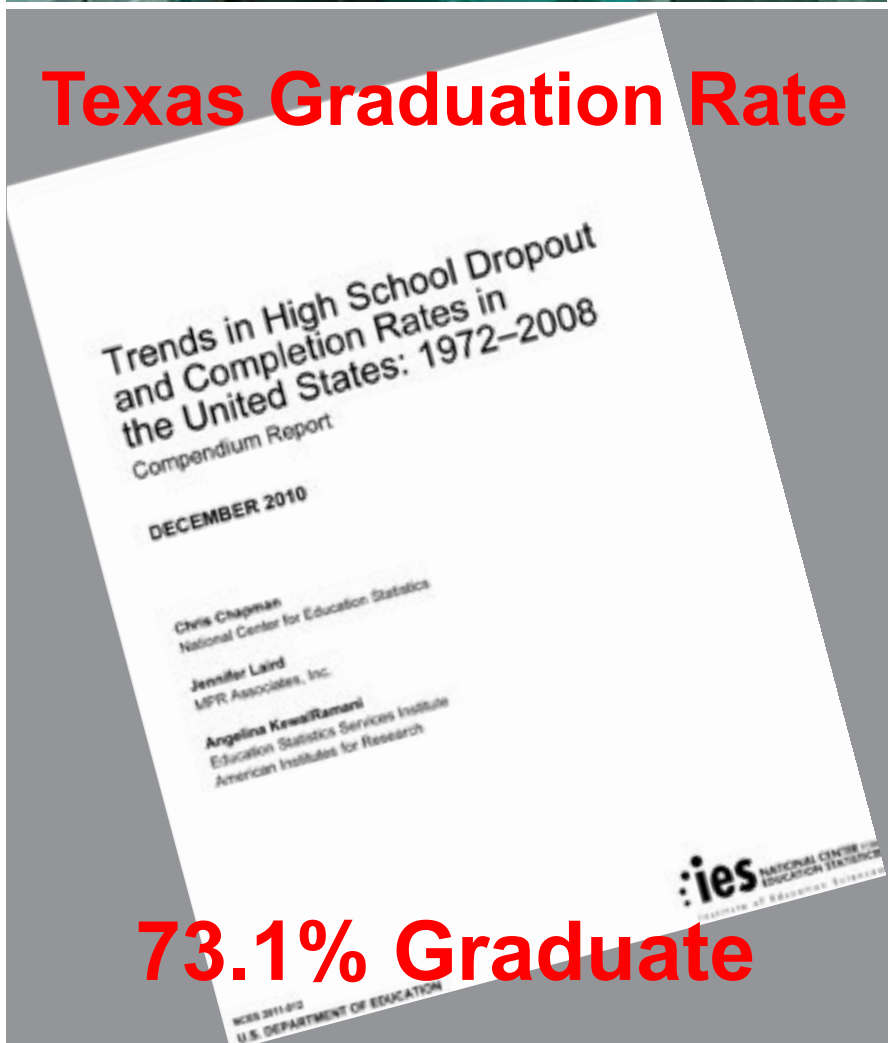
PATIENTS VS. STUDENTS

Why is this industrial mass production approach OK for kids in schools, but not for patients in hospitals? Is schooling less important than medicine? Should schooling be so much less specific to individual students than medical practices are to individual patients? Would you go to a hospital that treats patients the way schools treat kids? Would it worry you if you went to the hospital with pain in your stomach and the doctors put a cast on your leg?

Would it worry you to take your child or spouse to a hospital that has the same success rate with its patients that Texas high schools have with their students? Per this publication, we graduate 73.1% of our high school kids—that means about 135,000 kids/year dropout—just in Texas. What does that say to kids and parents about what is important?



Texas Graduation Rate



TIME VS. LEARNING

What do we say to a kid when we make time more important than learning? When we know with certainty that different kids, not to mention adults, learn at different paces? When time is meted out by bells that ring to start and end periods for teaching and learning? When we hold time constant vs. and accept varied outcomes for kids?

What do we say to a kid who understands the materials in the first ten minutes—you get to stay in your seat until the bell rings or semester ends.

What do we say to a kid who is really struggling when the class is over--that she still has to move-on to the next class and subject—OR that she fails and has to repeat the whole semester?

Should we measure schooling by how long a kid warms a seat or by the learning realized?

Is the process of teaching more important than the outcomes for kids?



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LEARNING TIME VS. DOING TIME

What do we say when schools are organized by grade levels and ages—not by the learning achieved by the students?

In 2010, there was a very bright 10 year old named Bachar Sbeiti, who completed grade 8 and wanted to go on to high school. But the school district said that he was too young—must repeat grades he's already successfully completed until he's old enough to enter high school. What if some school district in the 18th Century had taken the same approach with Mozart when he was writing symphonies at Bachar's age?

Are we measuring learning the same way we measure time in the slammer? Do we assume a kid's ready for the world for having done 13 years in school? That he/she can't be ready in 10 years? OR that it's bad if the kid needs 15 years? Even prisoners can get out early with good behavior. Shouldn't a kid get out early if he/she has done brilliant work—mastered the learning required? Should the kid be labeled as slow, as a failure if he/she needs more time to succeed?



Wikipedia



BELLS FIRST, LEARNING 2ND

What do we say to a kid when every single moment of every single day is fully scheduled and the kid is in a room under a teacher's supervision—and no time is allotted for him/her to assume responsibility for their own studies, for managing their time—for deciding what is important to their learning? How is this preparation for functioning in the real world—in college—at a job? How does this help to engage and motivate kids in their own learning?



1st period- 7:15-8:05

2nd period- 8:10-9:00

3rd period- 9:05-9:55

4th period- 10:00-10:50

5th period- 10:50-12:36

6th period- 12:41-1:31

7th period- 1:36-2:26

AGRARIAN CALENDAR

Many years ago, the school calendar was organized around the seasons and agriculture so that kids could help their families bring in the crops—and a big percentage of our population was involved in farming. But, today only about 2% of the U.S. population is engaged in agriculture. Does the agrarian calendar work equally well for the 98% of the population who make their living in other ways? What does our school calendar say to those kids in the 98% group when our schools are closed three months/year so that the 2% group can help on the farm?



COSTS OF FAILING STUDENTS

What do we say to a kid if he/she gets to the end of a nine month school year and has not met the learning objectives— We say YOU FAIL—then we say go back and repeat the very same thing that didn't work in the first place. Does that make any sense in terms of the kid's learning or his life OR in terms of the cost to the school and taxpayers? What if the student only needed a bit of extra help—a bit of extra time—not another full semester or year? Wouldn't that be less costly to all involved? Could schooling be more effective and less costly without the stigma of failure? Will archeologists wonder if we had a problem with the FLUNKEES or the FLUNKERS?

1 year, \$1600 for 1 credit

Student meets learning objectives in 1 school year

2 years, \$3200 for 1 credit

Student struggles is given extra help and time to earn credit, student succeeds, small cost increase for taxpayers.

1 year +, \$2000 for 1 credit

Student struggles is given extra help and time to earn credit, student succeeds, small cost increase for taxpayers.

INEFFICIENT USE OF \$\$\$, FACILITIES

Does it make sense to utilize school facilities worth billions of dollars only 9 months/year—yet pay for their upkeep the full year? Does it make sense to have to operate a third more schools than we would need if our schools operated continuously—like hospitals? Could we pay teachers more if they taught more kids over a twelve month vs. nine month school year? Will archeologists consider the budget issues schools have faced, and then look at how we operated our schools and be seriously puzzled?



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SLOW LEARNERS?

What do we say about the open plan school which was conceived more than 60 years ago to make schooling more flexible, collaborative, multidisciplinary, more responsive to kids—exactly the things to which we aspire today—and it was a big failure?

The **Five Open Plan High Schools** report from the Educational Facilities Laboratories¹ (1973, pages 6-5, Library of Congress Catalog No. 73-86667, copyright 1973 by Educational Facilities Laboratory, Inc.) set out ideas that remain current today:

- They called for “individual progress” programs that included both methods of instruction and the time for teaching/learning.
- They observed that:

“While open-plan schooling may seem an innovation, it carries on the tradition of the one-room schoolhouse, expanded to accommodate 1,000 students. The concept also attempts to instill in students, the quality of independence that we admire in our forefathers and believe their successors were weaned away from by making teachers the directors of what, when and how to study. After educators began to overcome this cultural mismanagement of students they had to wait until the schoolhouse could provide sufficient space for open curriculum programs to flower fully. This is also a matter of the right kinds of space. Physical restraints set arbitrarily fifty years ago must be swept aside to make way for the ebb and flow of different group sizes during the learning day.”

- AND, they described a “counseling system that displaces the homeroom tradition and substitutes a daily discussion between about 20 students from all grades and an adult counselor. The same counselor works with a student throughout his life at high school. Counseling groups meet weekly or at the start of each morning, to discuss topics ranging from academic and social performance to proposals for improving the school’s program or facilities. Each counselor has a broad interest in the well-being of his charges.”
- Prophetically, they noted that transforming schools “has as much to do with personnel as with facilities”—the very issue around which the open plan concept failed.

Clearly today’s digital technology has the potential to realize the original vision for open plan schooling, but what do we say when the same thing seems to be happening again today with technology? Districts have spent millions on technology for kids—and it has gone unused or underutilized because schools persist in teaching as they always have—as they did for years before the technology was available. THEN—folks fault the technology—AND the kids are perplexed because they already have the technology in their hands and in their bedrooms while their teachers continue to lecture at them and write on the wall.



RELEVANCE, ENGAGEMENT

English

Math

Social
Studies

Science

What does it say to kids about the relevance for them of the disciplines they are required to study—about the prospects that they will ever need/apply any of the stuff—when those disciplines are isolated from each other within the school—and from the world in which the students will actually use them? When you were in school, did you know what you were going to do with a quadratic equation—with the year of the Battle of Hastings—with the number of chambers in a reptile's vs. a mammal's heart—with the Ancient Mariner—with water everywhere and not a drop to drink?



COMMUNITY + SCHOOL

What do we say to kids when their school and their schooling are separated from the community that surrounds them—from the world in which they live—from the world in which their studies should be relevant? When the separations are serious stuff—security fences, metal detectors and x-ray machines? When you enter in the morning and can't leave until school is out in the afternoon—even for high school students? Are we telling kids the world is an awful, dangerous place? OR that they can't be trusted? Are schools supposed to be the centers of a community or isolated islands that float within the community?



Wikipedia



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LEARNING & DOING



Wikipedia

What do we say to kids when learning is an abstraction separated from doing/applying? Is it like asking kids to study musical scores, but not allowing them to hear or perform the music? Does this make it hard for students to see the relevance—to be engaged/motivated by their schooling?

Should we find that surprising? Should we be surprised that instruction does not work that way in the core subjects in most schools? That it has not worked that way for generations in our schools?



Wikipedia

ENJOYING EATING

What does it say to kids who love to eat in food courts in shopping malls—to talk with their friends, maybe even discuss their school work, maybe even enjoy eating/socializing—and mostly behave and don't get arrested—almost like real people—when we make them eat in cafeterias with seats bolted to the tables and monitors watching for miscreants?

How are school cafeterias really different from dining halls in penal institutions? If you had any choice at all, would you choose to eat in the environment in most school cafeterias?

Should kids really have to hope for a food fight to make lunch interesting? Are we giving kids an opportunity to behave and to be treated like responsible people OR are we tempting them to start heaving tomatoes?



Wikipedia



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Wikipedia

SCHOOL IDENTITIES, MASCOTS

What do we say to kids when we identity schools more by their mascots and athletics than by their academics? Do we help kids distinguish between what is really important for their futures? What do mascots say to kids when most of them are ferocious snarling critters—even for elementary school kids—and have nothing to do with schooling? Do we want kids to learn some positive trait from the mascot chosen for their school? Maybe we should appreciate the funny oxymoron mascots—like the mighty ducks. Or maybe we should appreciate a slug that reads Plato.

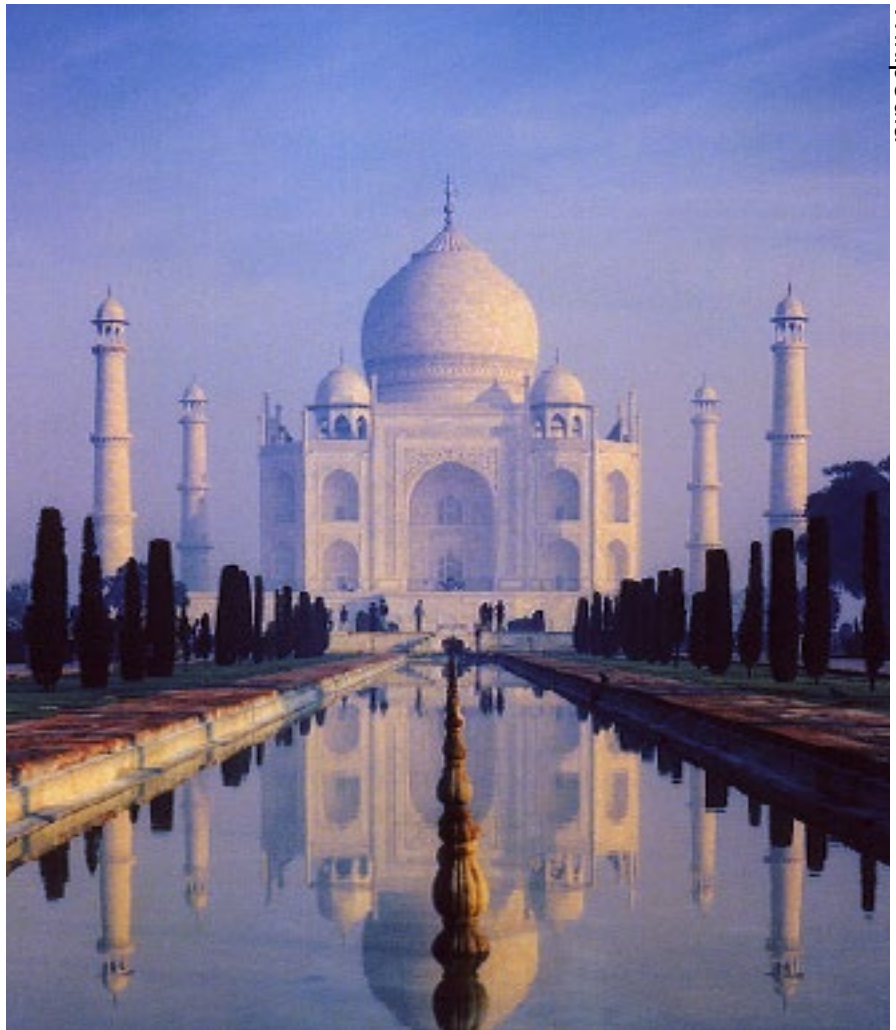


WARRIOR	WART HOG	WART HOG 2	WART HOG 3	WASP
WILDCAT	WILDCAT 2	WILDCAT 3	WILDCAT 4	WILDCAT 5
WILDCAT 6	WILDCAT 7	WILDCAT 8	WOLF	WOLF 2
MASCOT ADDENDUM				
AARDVARK	MONARCH	BEAR	BEARCAT	COUGAR
COWBOY	YANKEE	ANGEL	RABBIT	CAVALIER

CURSE OF THE TAJ MAHAL

There is one important area in which buildings can speak—and the public speaks back—the apparent costs. If you make a school that is ugly and cheap, most folks won't notice a lot, or care a bunch. But make one that is really nice and inevitably someone in the community will invoke the 'curse of the Taj Mahal' claiming you've built a school that wastes the taxpayers' money on extravagant architecture the little varmints don't need.

That's a message we don't want school architecture to send to the community—but such criticism of schools does say something to kids—we don't think you're worth it--maybe worth something—but not that much. Alas, we really have to be careful about what we 'say'.



OUR PRIORITIES???

What are our schools going to tell archeologists when they dig up one of them in the 31st century and consider the spaces we created in our schools and how we spent our money—what will they think was important to us? What will they imagine we wanted for our kids? Will our schools tell them that academics were most important—that learning was important stuff—that getting good grades was important--that getting a great job or getting into a good college was vital to our students' lives—OR will we tell them that mascots, sports, pompoms and marching bands were really why you went to school and that other stuff was something kids had to tolerate in order to be there?

What does it say to kids and communities when adults argue that we should have extensive extracurricular activities because it helps keep kids in school? Is that an argument for extracurricular activities, OR a surrender saying that we don't know how to make learning sufficiently engaging, motivating and relevant such that kids want to be in school?



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OUR PRIORITIES???

What are our schools going to tell archeologists about what we thought was really important if they read about reductions school districts made in their staffs as a result of state budget cuts—if they also read about facilities that were built in the same time frame for extracurricular sports programs that are used only for a few days during part of the year? It seems improbable that our artifacts will mislead future archeologists in this regard.

School staff reductions related to budget reductions. (2010-2012 school years, Source, Children at Risk)

Staff Type	Positions Lost (FTE)
Auxiliary*	6,973
Educational Aide	4,848
All Grade Levels	3,443
Elementary (1-6)	2,885
Secondary (7-12)	2,619
Pre-Kindergarten	1,132
Teacher Facilitator	971
Counselor	390
Kindergarten	358
Librarian	346
Total	23,965
* Auxiliary- non-professional or paraprofessional, including bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers	

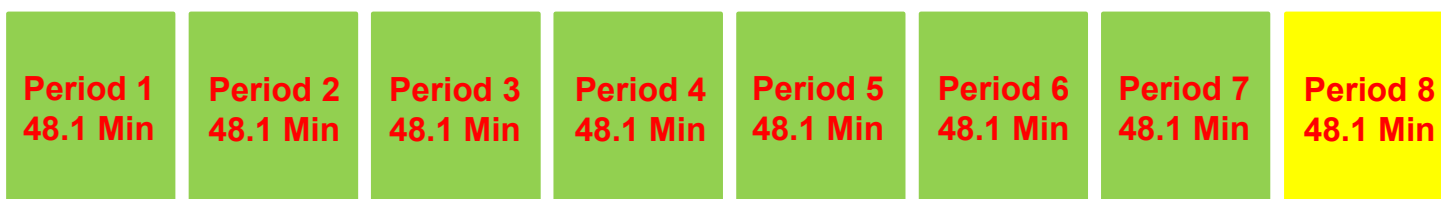
WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Subjects Required	Previous Credits	4 X 4 Credits
English/Language Arts	4	4
Fine Arts	1	1
Health	0.5	0.5
Languages Other Than English	2	2
Mathematics	3	4
Physical Education	1.5	1.5
Science	3	4
Academic Elective		
Social Studies/Economics	4	4
Speech	0.5	0.5
Technology Applications	1	1
Electives	3.5	3.5
Total Credits to Graduate	24	26.0

7 hour day, 7-55 min. periods, 390 min. instruction



7 hour day, 8-48 min. periods, 385 min. instruction



Several years ago the Texas Legislature added another year of math and science to the high school graduation requirements so that students had to take four years each of English, social studies, math and science—the change was dubbed 4 X 4. Given our rapidly changing and competitive world, the increased rigor and study seemed quite appropriate. But, educators found there was insufficient time during the school day for the two additional academic credits and extracurricular activities (primarily athletics). In lieu of extending the school day or scheduling these extracurricular activities outside school hours, most Texas school districts subdivided the typical school day to have 8 vs. 7 periods. This reduced every period by about 7-8 minutes and every student lost almost 23 hours of classroom time in every subject over a 180 day school year. When future generations reflect on the merits of 4 X 4 and the subsequent changes to make it happen, what will they imagine our priorities were relative to academics and extracurricular activities? The Legislature just modified the requirements again, but the question of time and our priorities remain.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

Maybe we should take pity on future archeologists and try to leave clear descriptions of our intentions chiseled on something durable. For example—advanced placement classes. Was the intention (1) that they would offer high school students more rigorous courses that would better prepare them for their work in college—so that fewer students would need remediation courses to succeed in college? OR (2) Was the intention that they would allow students to obtain both high school and college degrees in less time and at less cost?

Maybe both are noble aspirations, but from a distant future, will archeologists wonder if advanced placement programs had the same effect as 4 X 4 did in Texas. Years before advanced placement, schools offered courses with exceptional rigor (dubbed major works classes) for students who wanted more preparation for college. They would take the full four years of high school with extra challenging studies—then go to college for four years of still more rigorous study—a total of 8 years for two degrees—high school and a bachelor of arts. With dual credit advanced placement classes in high school, students may take rigorous classes and earn both high school and college credits and high school and associates degrees. OR, they can earn both high school and college bachelor degrees with 6 vs. 8 years of study. Can any one year high school course, regardless of its rigor, be as good as two years of high school and college study? Are we telling kids that we know so precisely what they need for their futures that they can skip a year of study and represent that they have earned the same degrees awarded in the past? What will archeologists think when they juxtapose advanced placement studies with America's drop in the international rankings from first to tenth in the educational attainment of those leaving high school, and from third to 13th for college students?² (Council on Foreign Relations, The Economist, June 29, 2013)

8 Years of Study

High School Diploma, Bachelor of Arts

High School- 4 years

College- 4 years



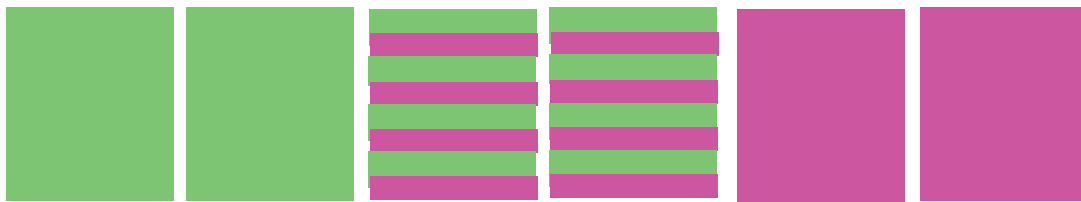
OR

4 Years of Study with AP Courses High School Diploma, Associates Degree



OR

6 Years of Study with AP Courses High School Diploma, Bachelor of Arts Degree



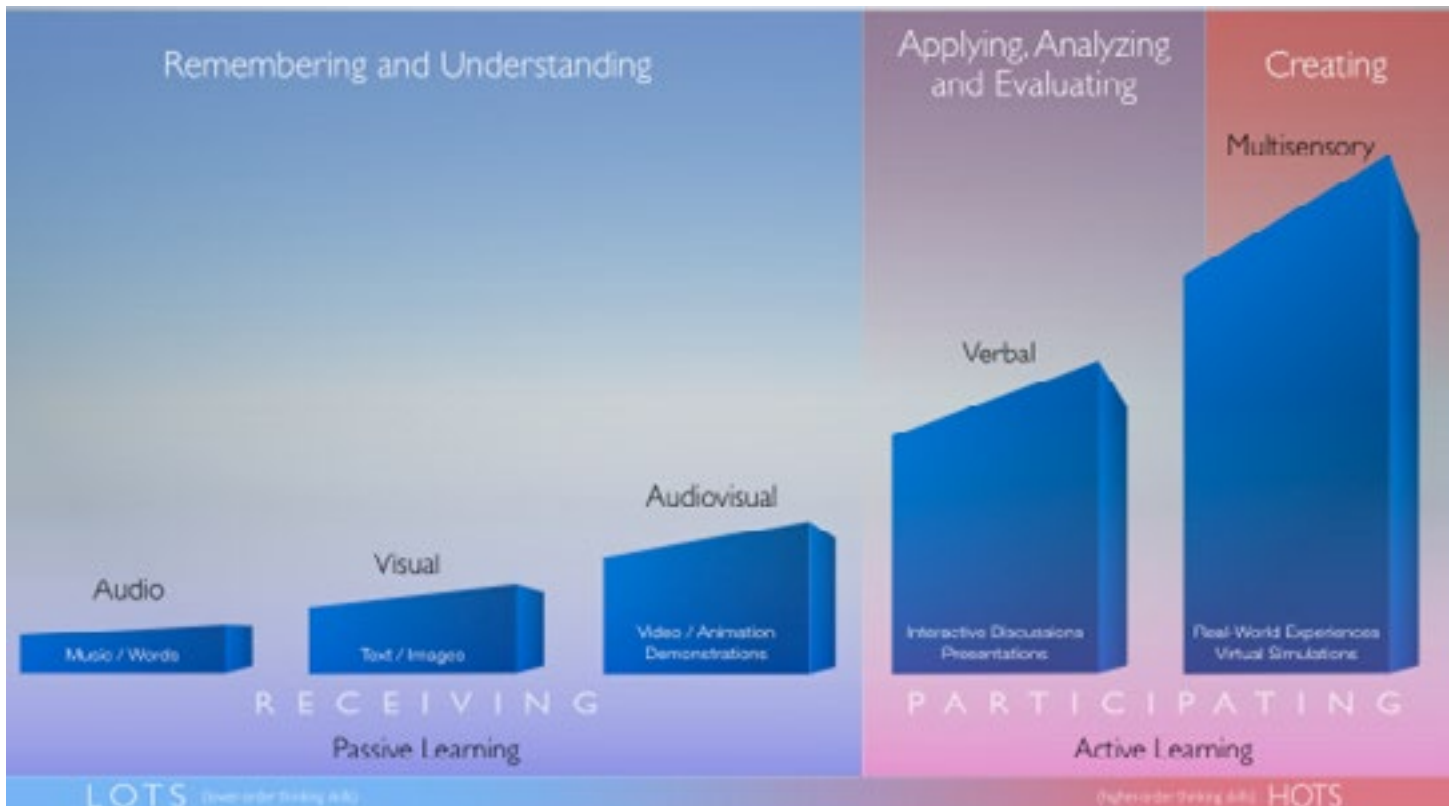
BROCCOLI OR APPLE PIE?

Are we saying that schooling can be/should be fun—or that schooling is like eating broccoli—that it's good for kids even if they don't like it? If we set out to make schooling fun---could it be as attractive as apple pie and ice cream? What could schooling be like if kids saw it as 'apple pie and ice cream---if they wanted to be there. Would classroom management and discipline be the same?

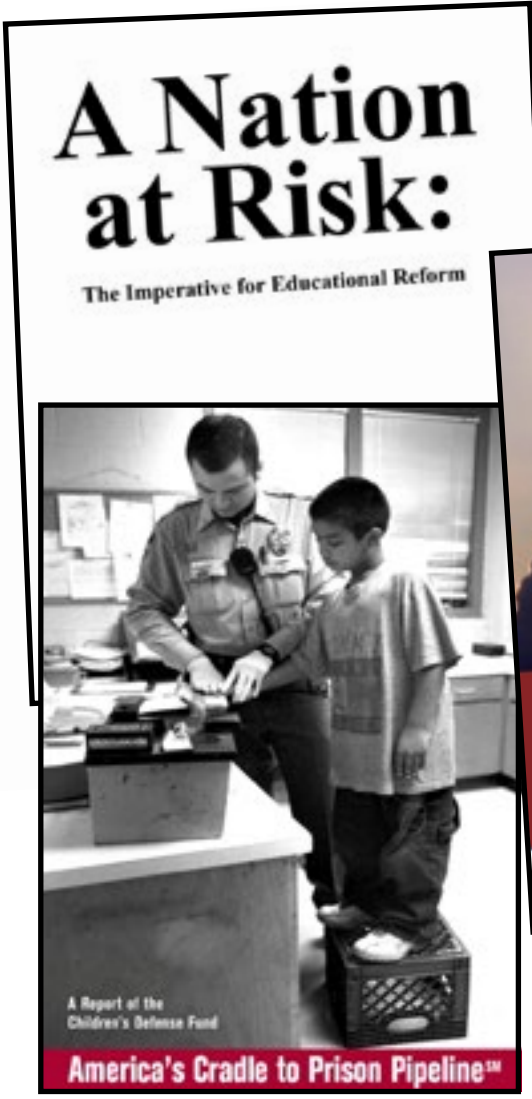
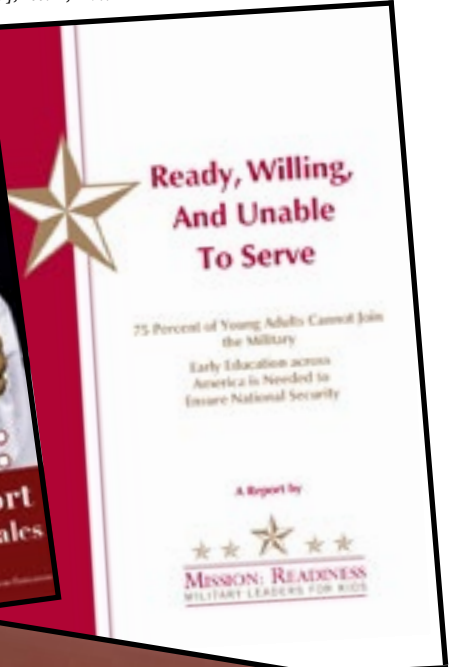


KNOWING WHAT WE KNOW

What does it say when we know that stand and deliver is the least effective way for kids to learn—when Bloom’s Taxonomy explained that in 1956—and that virtually everyone seems to concur. This is not a hotly debated notion—but standing in the front of the class lecturing remains. Maybe archeologists won’t worry about this because they never knew anything else in their own studies.



WHAT WE KNEW--WHAT WE DID

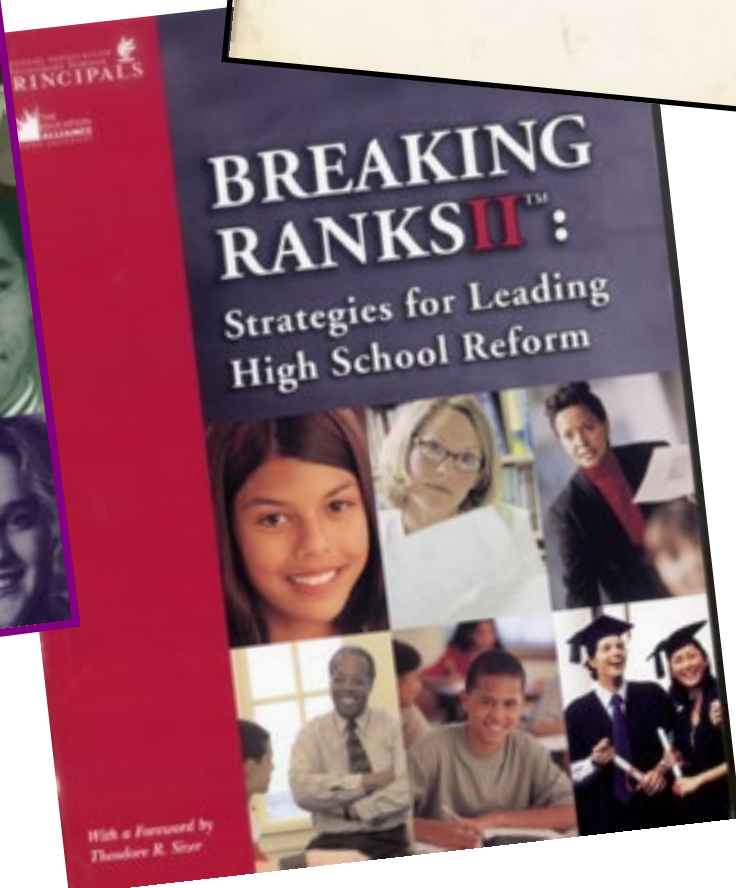
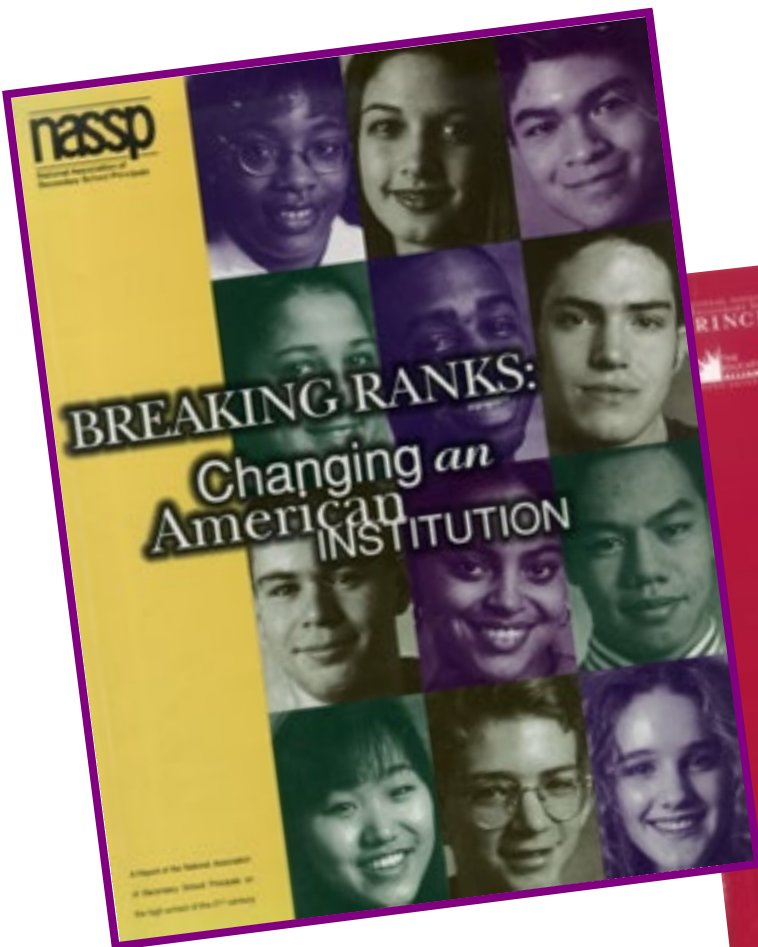


What will archeologists think, if they unearth a library full of publications clearly indicating that we knew our schools didn't work well? What if they read America's Perfect Storm which raised the concern that a decline in both the education and productivity of the future labor force will combine with our changing demographics to create the perfect storm---large numbers of poorly educated people set against an aging population.

What if they read Nation at Risk that was published in 1983, a generation before the others and totally ignored? What if they read Yes We Can and America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline and find that the rate at which black males were being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison exceeded the rate at which they were graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement? What does it say to a kid when we know with absolute certainty that much of what we do does not work for millions of kids—and we persist in doing it anyway?

GOOD IDEAS-- WHAT WE DID WITH THEM

Worse still, what will archeologists think when they unearth books with great ideas for making better schools—BUT that we ignored them and continued to do the same old thing generation after generation? The most brilliant book on this list was written in 1959 and it outlined a profoundly different way to make schools—no classrooms, multiple modes of instruction, flexible time, independent study/work time for kids—even the use of electronic learning devices—54 years ago.



SCHOOLS THAT WORKED WELL

Still more worrisome—what will archeologists think when they unearth schools that worked really well? What will they think of us when they figure out that the overwhelming majority of kids still went to schools with very old ideas we knew worked poorly?



Westside, Omaha



New Tech, Coppell



Zoo School, Minneapolis



KIPP, Houston



The MET, Providence



Wunsche, Spring

31ST CENTURY EXCAVATIONS

Are our schools saying what we want them to say to our kids and communities? Think about all those bronze dedication plaques with our names on them. Should we be pleased that when archeologists dig up our schools 1000 years from now, they will know who created them?



SHW stock image

Reference List

1. Educational Facilities Laboratories. *Five Open Plan High Schools: A Report*. New York City, NY; 1973.
2. The Economist. Catching on at Last. Economist. <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21580136-new-technology-poised-disrupt-americas-schools-and-then-worlds-catching-last>. Published June 29, 2013. Accessed November 29, 2013.