



Don't Give Up on Me-Don't Give Up on You

The Soul of Education

Try as we might there is no substitute for adults who believe in all children and youth; care enough about them to invest emotionally in their success; and are committed to helping them navigate that winding road we call future.

It's not that we haven't tried to find or design a program, curriculum or protocol that if adopted would help us help our kids without the messy social-emotional stuff that goes along with truly caring.

We want our students to do well in school. We have high standards for them: No Child Left Behind, Common Core, Positive Behavior Systems, Crisis Prevention Intervention, online curriculum, and alternative education. Add to that drop-out and drug prevention efforts, boot camps, scared straight, self-esteem programs, rewards, and demerits. What does it take to make these kids want to succeed?

It's pretty easy. The answer is found in each of us, not in imported programs. Let's put down all the manuals, flow charts, rubrics, matrices for just a moment and do what we are designed to do, CARE. Unfortunately, we can't mandate that. We can't even require it. But without it nothing seems to work as it should. It's the soul of education.

Just ask our kids what works and what doesn't. This is what they would say:

- Give me at least one teacher or caring adult who makes me feel excited about the future and I am 30 times more likely to be academically engaged.
- Don't treat me like a widget on an assembly line. Understand that both you (the adult), and I (the kid) are more driven by social-emotional factors than we are cognitive elements. That alone should be a huge clue about where to invest much of your time in helping me to succeed.
- Half of my friends in schools across the country do not feel hopeful. One-third of them say they are "stuck" and another 14 percent are "discouraged." That means we have a hard time setting goals. That means we lack ideas about our future and are apathetic about the opportunities it offers.

- That's not who we want to be. That isn't what we signed up for. That wasn't our promise when we entered the world. We arrived as natural learning machines. It was an exciting world. We could explore, learn to crawl, walk, talk, sing color, laugh, play, dance, and understand symbols like letters and numbers. We were even potty trained. No small accomplishment. We achieved so much in our first five years of life. Sixty months. Less than an average car loan. We did all that and more.
- We proved we can learn; we can be engaged, we can be hopeful.
- Listen, I know it's not easy for you either. Some of us are real pills. We act like we don't care and don't try. We will give you plenty of reasons to give up on us. But don't. You see deep down we rather be hopeful than hopeless, and we rather be engaged than not. We rather succeed than fail. Some of us can't say that but we feel it and we need you to hear it.
- I know many of you are struggling as well. I learned that Fifty-six percent of teachers are not engaged in their work. That is going to affect my friends and me. Although I am not a statistician or at least not yet I can't help but wonder if the lack of teacher engagement could be part of the reason that 28 percent of my friends say they, too, are not engaged, and another 19 percent are so unhappy with school they act out their unhappiness and that affects others.

We must remember that "We are social to the core. Our big brains are there primarily to deal with social matters, not to see, to feel, or to cogitate about the second law of thermodynamics." (Michael Gazzaniga world leading neuroscientist.)

So let's have high standards and high expectations for student learning but root that in the most basic understanding where the student and his relationship with his teacher and other caring adults take precedent. And while we are at it let us not forget to acknowledge the adults in this equation. They too, need to know that someone believes in them, are emotionally committed, and will help them achieve their personal goals as well.

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