

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

Rethinking education - preparing for happiness

(Original)

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To get right to it: the world has changed. Since the industrial revolution (where the current form of our education system has its roots), the planet has made a 180 degree change and things have improved a great deal for a lot of us. Schools, though, changed comparatively little since then.

Basically, we need to rethink what our children need to learn to have a happy life. Qualities like adaptability, ambition, creativity and critical thinking, but also forgiveness, passion, kindness and courage are more important than ever now, and they are essential for young people to succeed today – be it on a personal, professional or academic level. And schools need to recognize this area of education as their responsibility.

Don't get me wrong, it is still important for students to learn about history and physics and literature, but we have to acknowledge that the world now makes greater demands on young adults than it was the case during the industrialization.

Also, it is simply not enough to teach students basic text book knowledge anymore, what we as a society and global community, growing and improving ever so fast need, is a generation of independent thinkers who are well prepared for all areas of life. Who are not afraid of new cultures and strangers because they know about their own cultural, ethnic and national identities without judging others on theirs. One of the biggest issues in educating and raising a child is how to combine cultural identity with the demands that the globalization makes on all of us.

I think it makes sense (and is very much necessary) to expand the curriculum to non-traditionally academic topics – things like every day (adult) tasks, such as how to get

insurance and how to organize a household, as well as education on careers, relationships, personality and mental health.

And we need to stop brushing these topics off as self-evident, because if schools don't take the time to properly educate students on these manners, they will start looking for council in other places, which could lead them towards unhealthy habits and possibly even extremism.

And with terrorism and discrimination on the rise everywhere, it becomes more and more important if not essential for young people to start participating in politics again. But I am not talking about enforcing one certain perspective or view on youth, (that would, in fact, be the worst thing we could do) but about educating students about recent events and the things they see on the news – and about discussing them with an open mind and encouraging students to form their own opinions to resist the dangers of extremism.

Last but not least - as this may be the most important point in all of this – we need to find a way to actively teach kids that grades and exams are in no way a measurement to determine self-worth. I cannot stress this enough, the pressure put on students by exams and the current overall atmosphere in education is not only highly damaging but also counterproductive, as it often results in poor mental health and thus poor academic performance. We need a positive, healthy and inspiring learning environment with highly qualified and properly paid teachers, smaller classes and ultimately less standardized tests – but more opportunities to encourage students to actually understand, question and rethink topics.

Because currently, school is not about learning anymore, it's about passing. We are forced to study for subjects that we don't care about and that are completely out of touch with our lives, to spend weeks studying for exams only to forget everything an hour after turning in the paper. We need to remind students of the reason they go to school every day – to learn, to grow and to expand their horizons, and not to please teachers or to achieve high scores by any means necessary.

Finally, Education is a basic human right and it needs to be treated as such - it needs to be easily accessible to everyone on the planet, regardless of gender, status, wealth, sexuality or race. Education is the key to success and the best shot we have at creating a better, more peaceful future for all of us.