

MASA/MASE Spring Conference – Speaker Book Review

The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need – and What We Can Do About It

Tony Wagner – 2008

Global Achievement Gap: middle class/poor and what we are teaching versus what kids need to learn!

Seven survival skills:

1. Critical thinking and problem solving
2. Collaboration across networks; leading by influence
3. Agility and adaptability
4. Initiative and entrepreneurialism
5. Effective oral and written communication
6. Accessing and analyzing information
7. Curiosity and imagination

Computer-scored, multiple choice standardized tests measure memorization not reasoning or analytics. Tests of cross-curricular competencies needed instead.

Review of professional training offered; Reform Du Jour decried; improvement extolled...

New three R's: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships

Today's kids are differently motivated and must be taught differently as a result.

Successful schools explored: built to advance the seven survival skills; filled with relevancy.

Socratic teaching: Powerful questions drive change!

The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life

William Damon – 2008

Case made for why purpose is crucial for thriving.

Childhood resiliency is built through purpose, autonomy, social competence, and problem solving.

Interviews with students reveal different types but a common thread of influence – families.

Groups: disengaged (25%), dreamers (25%), dabblers (30%), purposeful (20%); our role is to fill the purposeless vacuum that exists in some.

Strategies for parents and schools alike:

1. Take advantage of opportunities for dialogue
2. Support sparks of interest
3. Convey a personal sense of purpose
4. Impart wisdom about practicalities of life
5. Introduce mentors
6. Encourage an entrepreneurial attitude
7. Nurture a positive outlook
8. Instill a feeling of “agency” linked to responsibility

Community is a necessary element in building purpose; a society that cares creates public institutions that instill purpose.

Narrow focus on student achievement has put pressure on the noble quest to build purposeful people. “Why” questions must be asked instead; relevancy must be addressed.