

Taking Back Our *Public* Schools:

Escaping Market Myths
and Doing What Works Best for
Children, Democracy, and Our World
- Karl F. Wheatley, Ph.D.

“We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.”

- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Slide 1 up—title & quote

Slide 2 up with 3-5 minutes to go

I) 15 min broad overview

A)

Thank you Dan.

I’m a mythbuster: I study myths in various fields, and I study why we believe those myths and how we can escape their grasp so that we can do the right thing.

The last 15 years have been an incredibly busy time to be an educational mythbuster because America’s current education policies are based on a mountain of myths and misconceptions. The CEOs and billionaires who spearheaded the policies cleverly wove all the individual myths together to form a coherent but misleading and destructive story. I very intentionally will not repeat that story now, but you know how that story goes, and it has words like international test scores, failing, incompetent, need real reform, higher standards, measurable, testing, incentivizing excellence, greater accountability, standardization, competition, and charters.

Every major part of that of that corporate story about how our schools are performing and how best to improve them is false. In the words of the old Phil Collins song “It’s all been a pack of lies.”

But I’ve spent about 20,000 hours trying to understand that pack of lies, and that story is the dominant narrative that everyone knows by heart, and *that story* is why our education policies revolve around high-stakes testing even though high-stakes testing has failed wherever it has been tried. The fact that we all have *that story* playing in our heads instead of a more accurate and healthier story is why teachers lost their autonomy, it’s why we got scripted curricula, it’s why superintendents are bizarrely called CEOs, and it’s why we have too many standards, testing, and this destructive push to privatize education. The fact that we have *that story* playing in our heads instead of a healthier and more accurate story is why so many students and teachers are burned out, turned off, and in the case of my big sister who is a 2nd-grade teacher, retiring early.

We all be having so much more fun. Teachers and administrators could be excited about the adventure that each school day brings and a teacher in her mid 60s might say, “You know, I think I’ll teach a few more years. I’d hate to give this up now.”

I could be having so much more fun too, and less heartache.

I’ve been teaching teachers for 30 years, but you know what started happening in recent years when I’d show my classes a video of good teaching? The lights come up, and students will say: “Professor Wheatley, we know this is good teaching, and we know this is what’s best for children, and we’d love to teach this way, but we can’t. We have to teach to the test or we’ll be fired.”

This is American education today: Behind all the slick corporate rhetoric, too many teachers are scared to do what’s right, so children, families, and America are being harmed. Education is mostly test prep, and schools, especially for poor children, too often resemble boot camps or prisons. A lots of kids and teachers have actually told me that school IS prison.

This is immoral.

One of my students even told me that her test-obsessed administrator wouldn’t allow her to give five-year-olds a *four-minute* water fountain break during a 60-minute reading lesson!

This is educational malpractice.

So what do we do about it?

When my father and mother were in their teens, Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany tried to take over all of Europe. When I was a young child, there were “White’s Only” drinking fountains and bathrooms in America. When I was in my 40s, honorable American citizens who are gays or lesbians couldn’t legally marry the person they loved.

All those things were morally wrong, all those things kept people from enjoying the freedoms they deserve and living the life they dream of. But in all those cases, **caring, committed, and courageous people fixed those problems.**

When there is a yawning gap between what is morally right and what we’re doing now, **caring, committed, and courageous people will often rise up to fix that.** And even if there is simply too large a gap between the world we have now and the world we dream of, **caring, committed, and courageous people will often rise up to fix that.**

But *HOW* can we fix this set of problems in education? **HOW?** I’ve spent a lot of my recent career trying to answer that question, and to begin, we need two main ideas: **trees and stories.**

Slide 3 up: Tree

A paradigm of education is like a giant cultural tree made up of values, ideas, stories, beliefs, assumptions, metaphors, goals, and educational practices. The underlying values and

principles are its roots, main categories of teaching practices are the main limbs, very specific methods are the smaller branches and leaves, and student outcomes are the fruit. If you had some ugly tree in your front yard that dropped smelly toxic fruit, you would know that to get rid of it, snipping off a few of the small branches on top wouldn't do anything—the tree would simply grow new ones. To get rid of it, you must chop off the main limbs and chop out the tree by its roots. And if it's one of those incredibly persistent trees like a Chinese Elm, you need to chop out ALL the roots, or it keeps coming back over and over again. For us, complaining about a specific standard, test item, or curriculum is like snipping off a small branch up top while leaving the offensive tree standing. Tonight you and I will talk about and model how to chop down the tree of test-driven, factory style schooling **and** chop out its roots, while growing the tree of healthy big picture education. But to do that, we need to talk about the seeds and roots of these different paradigms for education.

Let's look at page 7 in the handout, on the left-hand side. You can see the seed ideas that got this paradigm growing, the metaphors that nourished it, the root values and principles, the type of research that holds up the base of the trunk, and then main limbs branch out into real-world teaching practices and then the outcomes, which are the fruit of this whole paradigm. The tree metaphor helps us understand some things about how a paradigm of education grows, how it's structured, and what we need to do to remove it—we must chop off main limbs, chop at the trunk and chop out the roots, and crush the seeds. And if others are tempted to plant such a tree, it helps to point out to other people all the rotten fruit the tree produces. But the paradigm of corporate-oriented, text-driven, factory-style schooling is not really a physical tree—only the teaching-learning activities have any real physical existence. Thus, notice that the main structure of this whole paradigm for education is just words, ideas, beliefs, and values. It's all in our heads and our hearts.

Robin Williams said "No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world," and what America needs now are fresh ideas to steer education and society. So if we want to take back public education, we need to develop a new and more accurate story about education, one that chop out the seeds, roots, and limbs of the market-based paradigm for schools and society, and that also helps grow a new education paradigm in our hearts and minds. At first, we will work to chop down one educational paradigm and grow a new one using just words and stories.

If words and ideas seem like a flimsy tool for such daunting advocacy efforts, please notice that the wrong words and ideas got us into the mess we are now in. And please notice that the words and ideas of the Declaration of Independence helped change the future of the world. And the words of Martin Luther King Jr's *I Have a Dream* speech moved a nation.

But it's not enough to just engage in superficial celebrations of Dr. King's legacy, let's vow to fight for what's right for children and for America, and let's use Dr. King's genius to help light our way. Much of the power of the *I Have a Dream* speech comes from the obvious disconnect between Dr. King's wonderful dreams for little children and for America versus the harsh realities of that time.

Dr. King's model works for us works, because we also have a dream. *WE* have dreams for children, for education, and for our world, and those dreams should be our starting point in education and in our advocacy efforts.

Please take a moment to imagine the kinds of schools you dream of, and the wonderful learning experiences you'd like to see for children.... Got it?

So, did running schools more like a business helped us move closer to our dreams?

Slide 4 up:

**Broad Effects of 12 Years of the “Market-Based”
Takeover of American Public Education**

- ▶ Narrowed and dumbed-down curricula. Important disciplines neglected or ignored. Superior teaching methods driven out of classrooms. Endless test prep. Charters and vouchers appear to have done more harm than good.
- ▶ Squashing of democracy in education. Loss of teacher autonomy. Erosion of teacher status, pay, and job security. Overworked and burned-out teachers. Growing shortages of teachers and administrators.
- ▶ Unscientific testing and accountability methods. Misleading accountability “report cards.” Hundreds of billions of dollars wasted on failed policies.

Please raise your hand if this was what *you* dreamed of for schools.

Please raise your hand if all this feels more like a bad dream or nightmare.

8:30

Market ideology failed so badly in education that it feels like a bad dream.

Market ideology failed us, and is taking us away from our dreams, but if you say that, the policymakers will say you're just whining. They'll claim the policies were tough love that benefits kids. Well, *did* the policies help us achieve our dreams for kids?

Since 1989, I've asked thousands of people all over the country to list their top goals for what children will develop, learn, and become by age 18. *We have dreams* for children, and people's lists of #1 goals for kids always look roughly like this:

Slide 5 up:

People's Most Cherished Goals for Children by Age 18

- Caring, love of learning, creativity, problem-solving, social skills, collaboration, independence, initiative, respect for themselves and others, character, risk-taking, life-long learning, critical thinking, confidence, persistence, good citizenship, strong work ethic, communication skills, adaptability, and to be well-rounded, happy, and healthy.

Yes, people still value subject matter learning, but that's almost never their top goal, and what they want there is deep understanding, real-world competence, and that kids like or love the subject.

Those are our dreams for children, but what does corporate-oriented, test-driven schooling focus on?

Slide 6: TEST SCORES !!!

So advocacy strategy #1 is identifying what people really dream of for children, and then highlighting the fact that the market ideology for education focuses on something else.

Then we ask if corporate-oriented, test-driven, factory-style schooling is helping us achieve our dreams for kids?

Slide 7 up:

Effects of 14 Years of Market-Based Education

- ▶ MB policies emphasize self-interest, not caring: Bullying is a problem in many schools.
- ▶ Intrinsic motivation and student engagement steadily decline with every year in school.
- ▶ Creativity was rising for decades but started declining at start of standards movement!
- ▶ Everyone sure is working hard, but real citizenship isn't on the tests.
- ▶ Goodbye "well-rounded": Policies ignore many subjects and whole-child development.
- ▶ We're fixated on test scores, but obesity crisis a far greater threat to children & society.
- ▶ Toxic stress, anxiety, and depression are reaching epidemic proportions.
- ▶ NAEP '08-'12 long term trend scores for 17-year-olds were flat across the board.

Let's take these one at a time:

#1: Children imitate the moral model of adults, and these policies adopted a coercive bullying approach.

#2 isn't natural: Kids' motivation to learn keeps going strong when they experience more student-centered education.

#3: Ironically, business leaders say creativity is the #1 leadership skill needed for the modern economy. However, tight control and standardization stifle initiative, critical thinking and creativity, all of which benefit from substantial freedom instead.

#4: If you're not developing wise and active citizens, the nation will be in trouble, and looking around, I think we are.

#5: The health of families and strength of America depend on healthy, strong, and well-rounded individuals. But current policies are clobbering whole-child development.

#6: Physical health is important for many reasons, obesity alone costs us a couple hundred billion dollars annually. So *why* are we canceling recesses to cram for tests? here

#7: Americans are now so anxious and depressed that the average teen today would have been at the 85th percentile on the depression distribution in the 1950s. We're obviously doing something wrong and toxic stress in schools plays a role.

#8: Although most of what matters in education and life isn't on tests, notice how the policies affected the most trustworthy test score we have, the NAEP long-term trend scores for 17-year-olds. During the most intensive market-driven and test-obsessed period in our history, those NAEP scores were flat in both reading and mathematics, for both genders and all racial groups. **Flat!** I don't trust test scores much but it's ironic that those NAEP scores were the same after a decade of intensive test-driven reforms as they were in 1973, during the free-wheeling open education movement. **Take that Bill Gates and Arne Duncan!**

So, we need to teach people that **market ideology failed** to improve student outcomes and directly made several worse. We need to teach people that market-based policies take us away from our dreams for kids.

Let's hear voices from the education trenches:

Slide 8 up:

People Speaking Out About How Market-Based Policies Failed Children

- ▶ “My son already hates school, and he's just halfway through kindergarten. . . . Now kindergarten is a 30-hour-a-week job. There's nightly homework; finger painting is a rare treat; and as for naps, there just isn't time.” - *L.J. Williamson, LA Times*
- ▶ “This law has turned my sweet, happy classroom into a test-prep mill.”
- *Monica Hart-Nolan, Half Moon Bay teacher*
- ▶ “Standardized testing is the worst thing that could have happened. You're producing scientists that think every experiment has perfect answers.”
- *Reid Walker, Colorado biology teacher*
- ▶ “We're training our children to be the most anxious, stressed-out, sleep-deprived, judged and tested, poorly nourished generation in history.”
- *Merilee Jones, former Dean of Admissions, MIT*

The policymakers love “data-based decision making,” but the main pattern I see in all these data is that **Market ideology failed badly in education.**

But when **market-based policies failed** repeatedly, the CEOs always blamed teachers, unions, or “poor implementation.” That's just a marketing ploy. The reality that we need to teach others about is that market-based policies will always yield inferior results in education. Here's why:

Slide 9 up

Why Running Education “More Like a Business” Does More Harm than Good

- ▶ 1) Market ideology ignores two of the three critical purposes of education.
- ▶ 2) Narrow focus on students as replaceable workers leads to ignoring whole-child goals and outcomes that are at the heart of healthy development and learning.
- ▶ 3) Manufacturing principles directly conflict with developmental principles.

- ▶ 4) Tight corporate style control is antithetical to the freedom and individualization that are cornerstones of quality education.
- ▶ 5) Market ideology tends to promote increasing inequality, which is highly toxic.
- ▶ 6) Market ideology is hostile to and attacks the founding principles of America.
- ▶ 7) Thus, in apples to apples comparisons, kids from public schools learn as well or even better, but public education also better promotes intrinsic values and the core values and goals of our democracy (equal opportunity, freedoms, social mobility).

Clarify #1, 3, and 6

To sum up, trying to “run schools more like a business” inevitably backfires because...

1) Education’s purposes are broader, deeper, and different than those of factories, businesses, or economic markets.

and 2) Kids are not cars, and great development and learning do not work like manufacturing.

Repeat above

In fact, the deepest structural flaw with K-12 education for over a century is that its design and operations were based *far too much* on the logic of factories and businesses. We need to teach people *Why* is manufacturing the wrong metaphor for education? Education is an organic and cultural affair, not a mechanistic affair such as manufacturing, or an economic exchange like buying something. Students are not inert raw materials or products, nor are they customers: they are living, breathing, dreaming organic and cultural beings. In fact, the way that healthy development and learning work is often *the opposite of* the logic of markets and manufacturing. For example, tight control, measurement, and standardization work wonders for manufacturing amazing automobiles, but they directly undermine healthy development and learning in at least a dozen ways. So, running education “more like a business” will *always* backfire badly because it works *against* the laws of nature, works against the principles of representative democracy, and works against the needs of a healthy civilization.

However, the CEOs and billionaires have one trump card left, and that’s to tell us we *have to* run schools more like a business because the whole world has been gradually remade in the corporate image, and kids just have to get used to that way of doing things. Well, let’s see how well that market takeover of society is working.

Channeling Dr. King, WE also have many great dreams for the world, and thousands of people—including children and adults at our church this past Sunday—have told me their dreams for the world look this.

Slide 10 up:

We Have Great Dreams for the World

- ▶ Good, secure jobs. Broad prosperity. Eliminate poverty and disease. Strong families. Safe neighborhoods. Healthy, happy kids. More time to do what you love to do. Caring communities. A trustworthy government that looks out for average people. Less racism, sexism, etc.. A cleaner planet and healthier ecosystems. A stable climate. End wars and terrorism and finally achieve peace on earth.

Let's see if turning civilization over to market ideology created the miracles they promised and helped us achieve our dreams.

Slide 11 up:

America (& The World) After 36 Years of Increasingly Market-Based Governance

- ▶ Widespread poverty and hunger. Staggering & rising inequality. Fewer good jobs. Crushing personal debts. Struggling families. Exploited workers. Toxic stress. Anxiety and depression. Drug addictions. Suicides. Declining trust & social cohesion. Rampant chronic diseases. Superbugs.
- ▶ Corporate scandals. Corrupt and dysfunctional governments. National debt crises. Deeply-flawed candidates. Endless wars. Refugee crises. Terrorism. Poisoned farmland. Water shortages. Dying oceans. Global warming. Climate disruption. Epic storms.

That's weird. They promised miracles, but I teach Sunday School, and this looks more like the 10 plagues of Egypt, but here, *the market-based plagues* are devouring people, society, and the planet. A market-based approach is moving away from our dreams for the world.

Why does market ideology fail so badly?

Slide 12 up:

Why Market-Based Approaches So Often Do More Harm Than Good

- ▶ Market ideology emphasizes extrinsic values, so intrinsic values/goals that are critical for individuals and a healthy civilization get neglected or intentionally trampled:
- ▶ Individualism crowds out the "me-and-we" focus a healthy civilization requires:
- ▶ Focus on competition crowds out the cooperation a healthy civilization requires:
- ▶ Market ideology ignores or is hostile to the founding values of America:
- ▶ Running society based on business principles makes inequality much worse (which reliably creates a wide array of social dysfunctions):
- ▶ Market approaches have extra costs built in, and are very wasteful:
- ▶ Workers, Families, Democracy, and the Environment are All Obstacles to \$\$\$ Goals:

As for extra costs, in fields where the public sector can do the job, having the private sector do it instead adds marketing costs, adds the costs of exorbitant CEO salaries, and adds the need to pay shareholders a return on their investment. In healthcare and other parts of government that were

been privatized, using private contractors generally costs much more. And as we see in healthcare, market-based approaches inevitably lead to not getting everyone's needs met, which leads to snowballing health problems and costs, and it's far more expensive to treat preventable diseases after the fact than it would have been to just meet everyone's basic needs on the front end.

The last point is an expansion of the first point, and basically means that when you organize society around worshipping wealth and economic growth, then people, the planet, and democracy all get shafted. We're seeing that right now all around us.

16:18

So where are we? Here's the market-based path we are walking right now in education.

Slide 13 up

We have wonderful dreams for children and the world, but market-based thinking and market-based policies are preventing us from achieving those dreams

So should we stay on this path or turn back and choose a different path?

Slide #14 up:

Two paths diverged into a wood,
and I...
I took the one less traveled by,
...and that has made all the difference."
-Robert Frost

It's time to choose our path---more market-oriented, test-driven schooling **OR** education guided by principles of human development and democracy **OR** you just aren't sure yet.

So-o-o-o-o-o-o...

* Please raise your hands if you think we should continue with market ideology, test-based accountability and privatization? Thank you.

* Please raise your hands if you aren't sure. Thank you.

* Raise your hands if you think we should re-design education more around our most cherished goals for children and based what we know about human development and democracy?

Phew, if you answered the reverse, I would have had to scrap what I'd been planning for months.

So many of us have publicly committed to walking off down a new path, but as educators, we then face the same obstacle that faces our entire civilization. And that is, we know things are broken, and our approaches in many fields simply don't work because they are based on a market ideology that doesn't fit how most of life works, but there is no coherent and well-established counternarrative that provides a path forward.

Educators complain about too many tests but don't propose a coherent alternative. Both Sanders and Trump correctly pointed out that our current economic system is rigged to benefit the 1% and hurt everyone else, but Trump's proposed policies just make these problems much worse, and even Sanders didn't offer a coherent counter-narrative for what we should do differently. More generally, the Democratic Party, which once was the reliable defender of average Americans and the environment, is morally and intellectually adrift. Making matters worse, it's rapidly becoming obvious that capitalism as we know it is an unworkable system on a crowded planet with finite resources and limited capacity to absorb all our wastes.

But although the upper branches of our current trees of education and civilization are a mess, the supporting ideology of market-based thinking is the only tree we can see, it's the only basis we have now for supporting schools and society.

The definition of insanity may be doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, but until we chop down the market paradigm for schools and society and grow a new paradigm to support them, we are going to be stuck using the same failed market-based ideology over and over again, and keep failing to achieve our dreams. It's like the movie Groundhog Day.

So we need a new story that chops down the unhealthy market paradigm and helps grow a healthier paradigm for schools and society. I've actually already started telling you that new story, but let's turn the page and see what comes next.

Slide 15 up

Public education is a unique profession. Public education is a *unique* profession, profoundly different from for-profit businesses or manufacturing. Businesses seek to offer a good product or service, but their success is defined mostly by their profits—by what they get *for themselves* in the end. Education is profoundly different from business: teachers and administrators are *public servants* whose ultimate success is defined entirely by how much of themselves *they give away* and by how much *they help others* grow.

Like our military or our national highway system, American public education is one of our national treasures and public school educators are *everyday heroes* working hard to help children and families, a task they often do in the face of long odds. Our schools are not perfect, no profession is, and **I believe American education was sent on the wrong mission,** but the armchair quarterbacks who bash teachers and schools usually have no clue how education works or how hard it is. Teaching children and running schools is intellectually challenging, logistically overwhelming, morally perplexing, and emotionally and physically draining. Your job is way harder than mine is.

So if you work in public education, please stand up.

For all these *everyday heroes*, let's have a big round of applause.
Thank you.

Public education is one of our national treasures, but it's been hijacked by misguided or greedy vandals who are destroying it and taking us further and further away from our most cherished dreams for children and society. This is *morally* unacceptable.

Thus, I'm here... to help create a healthy, happy, and peaceful revolution in education and society.

So please buckle your seat belts, and bring your seatbacks and tray tables to their fully upright and locked position, because we can expect some turbulence on this flight!

Why a *revolution*? Why not just tinker a bit?

Our Founding Fathers started a revolution because monarchy-based governance was an inferior *system* and they were fed up with the way King George's actions were trampling on their lives, liberties, and pursuits of happiness. Today, America needs a peaceful revolution for schools and society because we let market-based thinking take over America, and market-based governance of schools and society is *an inferior system* that is trampling on *our* lives, *our* liberties, and *our* pursuits of happiness. We're fed up with it.

"Revolution" can conjure up strong images, but this is a peaceful revolution that will not only serve students and families better, it will help to *reduce* violence, wars, and terrorism. It is a peaceful revolution that seeks changes much like those already brought about by the women's suffrage movement, Civil Rights, marriage equality, and the environmental movements.

But what kind of revolution do we need? At the very root of our systems failures in education and society are *moral failures*, so **we need to re-think and fundamentally re-structure the moral underpinnings of society**. We made money and the economy the master of people, of education, and of the planet, but that's not just backwards, it is immoral and insane. Reflecting on this moral flaw at the very heart of our civilization, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. concluded that we needed "a radical revolution of values." That revolution pivots around one urgent and deeply moral choice:

We can keep sacrificing people and the planet to serve money and the economy.

OR...

We can have the economy and government serve people and the planet.

Scientists are screaming at the top of their lungs that only one of those choices can work in the long run, and many people know in their hearts that we desperately need a much more caring and sustainable civilization. OK, but what's comes next? The American Revolution began with some self-evident truths and then evolved as we increased the freedoms and equal opportunities that were granted to an ever-expanding circle of people. Following that successful model, I take these truths to be self-evident, that as a basis for organizing civilization ...

- caring for and cooperating with others is morally superior to competing against them and ignoring their needs;
- an environmentally sustainable economy is morally superior to an unsustainable one;
- broad prosperity is morally superior to concentrated wealth coupled with pervasive poverty, staggering inequality, and widespread wage slavery and debt slavery; and finally
- widespread security and freedom to live the life of one's dreams are morally superior to extravagant freedoms for the few, coupled with most citizens experiencing insecurity, fewer freedoms, struggle, and suffering.

But we're educators, so what does this mean for schools? It means we need a whole new paradigm for education. If we don't change paradigms, we'll be stuck forever using strategies that are doomed to fail, and feeling depressed that we're working hard but still moving away from our dreams.

What are some defining features of this new paradigm, which I call big-picture education?

First, schools and society must prioritize the goals of caring well for people and the planet.

Second, teaching and learning must be organized around principles of human development and democracy.

Let's shift to more grounded details.

Big-picture education is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of progressive constructivist, and more student-centered approaches. I use the term *big-picture education* to emphasize that we're aiming for broad and long-term effectiveness.

I've portrayed Big-Picture Education in three ways. Pages 2-4 of your handout have the most detail, and there's the side-by-side comparison on page 7, but here's an overview of key ideas and practices:

Slide 16 Up: BPE Essentials

We'll start from the bottom because we must grow the paradigm starting with seed ideas and then root values and principles.

► Most Formal Education is *Public* Education

The seed idea that grew the massive market takeover of schools and society is the myth about the alleged superiority of market-based approaches. Big picture education begins with the opposite assumption, that many things in life—like educating a nation's citizens—naturally belong to the public sector: A healthy public sector does many things better than the private sector does and does many things the private sector will not do or cannot be trusted to do such as tax adequately, regulate effectively, protect people and the planet, and empower people, all while defending core American values such as freedoms, equal opportunity, and promoting the general welfare.

► **Core Values: Caring for People and the Planet**

You can't build a healthy civilization based on unhealthy values like radical individualism, greed or defining life as a competition against others. Let's review the central issues here

Slide 17: The Values We Embrace Shape the Fate of ...

Let them read it.

So over-emphasizing extrinsic goals—which is what market thinking influences us to do—is bad for people and the planet. Research reveals that the more people are primed to think about money and personal profits, the less they care about what happens to other people or the environment. Humanity is reaching multiple tipping points—economic tipping points, social tipping points, and environmental tipping points, and which path we follow into the future will make all the difference. Prioritizing intrinsic goals is much healthier overall.

Slide 18: BPE Essentials

► **Aim to develop well-rounded individuals, wise citizens, & skilled workforce**

The long version of the third line up is that “Public education must educate healthy and well-rounded individuals, AND wise and active citizens, AND also a skilled AND ethical workforce.”

American workers are the most productive in the world, so purpose that hardly needs more emphasis, but we rank last or next to last among developed nations for physical and mental health. And as recent elections revealed, our citizens are poorly informed, often fail to vote on profound matters that determine the fate of our nation, and we're fighting like cats and dogs.

If we want to take back our public schools and heal society, we must re-assert that all public education **MUST** be about all three goals.

Thus, when someone says schools should just focus on “marketable job skills,” “College and career readiness” or “preparing kids to compete in the global economy,” we should politely but vigorously disagree. Those Trojan Horse phrases promote a dangerously narrow emphasis for education, one that will destroy society.

► **Prerequisites: 1) A Big-Picture Perspective, 2) Understanding Healthy Development & Learning, and 3) Ethical Professionalism**

Prerequisites: These are three critical prerequisites for doing big-picture education well.

First, a big-picture perspective means focusing on broad and long-term effectiveness, and not getting fooled by narrow and short-term results. If a diet helps you lose weight over two weeks, we all know this doesn't mean you'll keep that weight off in the long run nor does it mean that the diet's healthy. Similarly, if a teaching method helps kids learn some academic objective

today or this week, we need to realize that this doesn't mean that the teaching method will be effective in the long run for the broad range of goals we value. Just as losing more weight faster in the short run often backfires in the long run, **teaching more, earlier, and faster also often backfires in the long run.** This means it is impossible to accurately judge the effectiveness of teaching methods by kids' short-term learning of academic objectives.

Second, educators need to understand that all domains of development matter and affect one another reciprocally. Teacher educators train teachers to write lesson plans that only have academic goals and objectives, and that's as crazy as having a mechanic who cares for your engine block and drive train but doesn't take care of your steering, electrical system, or brakes. Academics-only education flies in the face of everything we know about development and learning: The **ONLY** way to optimize human development and learning is to attend to whole child development.

28:51

Third, educators need the ethical professionalism to stand up for what is right, instead of just obediently following orders. We need to stand up and say No More! This ends now.

So what does big-picture education look like in schools?

Practicing Democracy

Big-picture education emphasizes practicing democracy daily in classrooms and school governance. Kids get as much input as possible into the direction of the curriculum and how the class is run, and teachers and parents get as much input as possible into how the school is run. That seems impossible when your educational model is a monolithic standardized factory, but becomes more manageable when schools transition to becoming caring learning communities. Students will face countless high-stakes decisions when they reach adulthood, and the **ONLY** way for them to be prepared to make wise decisions is for them to get **LOTS** of practice making lower-stakes decisions while under caring adult supervision and guidance.

► Safe Schools & Caring Communities

John Holt said, "The scared fighter may be the best fighter, but the scared learner is a poor learner." If schools do nothing else, they'd better be a physically and psychologically safe place for children. Whether I'm the only black kid in second-grade or the only openly gay boy in the high school or the kid who is always the slowest to learn something, I must feel safe and be treated with the same respect as other kids are. No excuses, no exceptions. Our highest moral value is love, and **ALL** children should feel safe, feel cared for, and have friends.

Safe and caring includes everything from the teachers' tone of voice to peaceful conflict resolution, anti-bullying, morning meetings where kids get to know each other, and learn to resolve class-wide problems. It means honoring effort and progress of everyone, not just honoring the best performers. When motivation researchers work with schools, they tell them to stop having awards assemblies, take down the honor roll and the superstar wall of fame, stop

posting perfect papers on the bulletin board, and start honoring everyone's effort and personal progress instead. Get rid of the classroom competitions. Implement true cooperative learning. By the way, all this is also how you promote a growth mindset too. Safe and caring means we move away from one-size-fits-all learning objectives. We move towards process-oriented goals and objectives plus goals written to emphasize that kids will *improve* their skills or learn more—which will mean something different for every kid. Objectives that say “Students will be able to do X 4 out of 5 times” need to go bye-bye and we need goals that say “Students will improve their ability to do X” or “students may learn 3 new facts about mammals” or “students will enjoy learning about firefighters” Safe and caring also means we don't see 25 identical penguin art projects or insist all kids solve math problems the same way—the emphasis on one right way to do things makes kids fear they'll do it wrong and often teaches them that how *THEY* do things is deficient.

Balanced Goals

This means that our overall curriculum and stated goals and objectives reflect developing well-rounded individuals *and* wise, active citizens and competent, ethical workers.

Next, a healthy diet provides fat **and** protein **and** carbohydrates **and** fiber **and** vitamins **and** minerals **and** phytonutrients **and** antioxidants because our bodies need all of the above. This, balanced goals also means meeting basic needs **and** promoting positive emotions **and** healthy motivations **and** promoting health **and** physical skills **and** social skills, **and** academic knowledge **AND** academic skills **and** caring **and** creativity **and** initiative **and** art skills **and** so on... because healthy development and learning require all of the above.

Most people dismiss the idea of emotion objectives, because factory thinking trained us to see them as too subjective or hard to “measure,” but emotions are central to development and learning. Let's look:

Slide 19: Emotions matter

Slide 20: Essentials of Big-Picture Education

Real-World Curricula

“Uh teacher, when will I ever need to know this in real life?” Real-world curricula, where kids learn from transdisciplinary play, projects, and units connected to real life helps answer that question. Will it be standardized? Heavens no. We don't want standardized children or citizens, and there are thousands of different jobs and life pathways students will enter when they grow up. One-size-fits-all is a lie in clothing and it's a lie in education, and the most important missing ingredient in American education today is **freedom**. Autonomy is one of the bedrock psychological needs for learners, and autonomy is the one thing teachers consistently said they valued most about teaching—before the accountability movement steamrolled it. Second graders study a construction site across the street, high school students do independent studies and apprenticeships on things that interest them, and classes do long-term in-depth studies of real-world topics such as sharks and political power.

In the elementary grades, we have the curriculum totally backwards. Reading and math don't "come first": curricula should generally begin with kids' questions about the physical and social world—meaning science and social studies are in the foreground and are the main content disciplines of the elementary grades. Reading, writing, mathematics and the arts all matter but they are *process* areas of the curriculum that can be best developed in the context of studying sharks and Rosa Parks and then representing what we have learned about them.

Whole-Child Teaching Methods

We need teaching methods that simultaneously benefit many or all developmental domains while developing individuals, citizens, and workers. This means less of teaching isolated academic facts and skills, and more learning facts and developing skills in the context of play, inquiry-based projects, and transdisciplinary units of study. Why?

NOTE: The apple-vs.-pill illustration below is very important but got cut from the delivered talk for lack of time.

(Have vitamin C pill and apple ready as props)

This is a vitamin C pill with 60 milligrams of ascorbic acid, and it only takes a few seconds to get it into my body. This is an apple, with only 15 milligrams of ascorbic acid, and it take me time to slice it up and chew it. On the surface, the narrowly Vitamin C pill seems more potent, faster, and superior. But a closer look reveals an apple has 263 times as much anti-oxidant punch as would be predicted by the amount of ascorbic acid it contains, so it actually has three times as much vitamin C-like activity as the vitamin C supplement, and apples also have vitamin K, vitamin B6, potassium, riboflavin, dietary fiber and smaller amounts of dozens of other nutrients. As nutrition expert Colin Campbell remarked, "It's as if the inside of the apple is bigger than it looks from the outside." And millions of years of evolution have designed our bodies to eat whole plant foods, so our bodies actually make better use of what's in whole plant foods than the make use of artificial vitamins.

The same principle applies to learning and teaching methods: Millions of years of evolution have created human beings who learn better from whole real-world experiences. Traditional reading instruction does boost testable reading skills faster. However, if you look closer you find that, like the apple, kids from whole language classrooms actually have just as good or better reading comprehension, better writing, better attitudes towards reading, better classroom behavior and got to learn a lot more science and social studies because they were engaged with real books about science and social studies topics, not controlled vocabulary readers that lack any nutritional content.

You look at the vitamin or direct instruction drills, and they appear to pack a more potent punch, but when you look closer, the reverse is true—whole foods and whole learning experiences are generally superior. But it's impossible to judge nutritional potency by looking at isolated vitamins and minerals, and it's impossible to judge educational potency by asking how much of a specific learning target or content standard a specific teaching method delivers. That's linear factory logic doesn't fit what we know about healthy development and learning. However, that linear factory logic has left most educators treating play as a waste of time, when in fact it's one of the most powerful learning mediums there is.

Authentic Assessment

Corporations train us to believe we need their products. We were taught we need lots of dairy for strong bones, GMOs to feed the world, and high-stakes testing to improve education. In reality, the countries with the strongest bones consume little or no dairy, we could better feed the world without GMOs, and education would be greatly improved if high-stakes testing would disappear tomorrow.

Teachers since Socrates have been doing data-based decision-making, but standardized tests usually provide the wrong kind of data to guide teaching.

We need more Authentic assessment means more on-the-spot and non-standardized assessments developed and carried out by teachers. Anecdotal notes, photos of student work, audio and video-recordings of students' performances, portfolios, student writing and work samples, and student self-assessments.

Will those assessments be objective? Of course not, all assessments—including tests, are inherently subjective. Will they be highly standardized? They often won't, because standardization sucks the life out of education. Will the assessments have super-high reliability coefficients? I hope not, because one the dirty secrets is that the assessments with the highest reliability focus on lower-level knowledge and skills and have poorer real-world validity. Real-world *validity* for assessing actual reading comprehension matters much more than does sky-high reliability for assessing low-levels skills like decoding and alphabet knowledge.

Trustworthy Research

One of the most frequent ways people get fooled about what works is they trust fatally-flawed research. Here's a dirty secret about research in education and many other fields: Most research, even most "very scientific research" is absolutely *useless* for telling you how you should eat, farm, or teach. Why? Most research is reductionist "little-picture research", meaning it looks at narrow and short-term effects caused by isolated changes in teaching, eating or farming, rather than examining what overall approach works best in the long run for the goals we value most. Why is that a problem? Let's look at three quick examples of the difference between *little-picture effectiveness* and *big-picture effectiveness*, because this is one of the most important things I have to share with you.

Slides 21-23: Little Picture vs. Big-Picture Views of what Works

Across many arenas of life, the approaches that yield the most dramatic but narrow and short-term results often yield broadly inferior results in the long run for the goals we value most.

Mother Nature is mighty and Mother Nature *always* bats last, so we have a choice to make. Are we going to eat, farm, and teach in ways that violate the laws of nature, and just treat the resulting damage after the fact? OR are we going to shift our eating, farming, and teaching to fit how nature works best and to fit the most pressing needs of society?

Slide 24: Ripples

New diets, farming methods, or teaching methods are like throwing 20 pebbles and stones in a still pond—you make a whole lot of different ripple effects for you, students, the schedule, the curriculum, student motivation and behavior, teaching materials, etc, and those different ripples interact with each other. Little picture research looks in a very careful way at just part of just one ripple and usually only in the short term, but ignores the rest of the pond and ignores the rest of the ripple effects. Then they tell you how “scientific” their study was, but this is actually lousy science because the design of the study doesn’t match the complexity of real classrooms. This helps explain why so many supposedly “evidence-based practices” don’t actually improve student outcomes when they are implemented over the long haul. That is, the practices were never effective from a big-picture perspective to begin with, but people trained in little picture thinking won’t usually catch that.

So when looking for good research, the most important question to ask yourself is whether it is narrow and short-term little picture research or broad and long-term big-picture research. But while I’m picking on researchers, we all make the same mistake by judging our teaching effectiveness today based on short-term results, when we really need to assess broader and longer term effectiveness.

That’s a quick overview of big-picture education

But does big-picture education work from a big-picture perspective?
Most educational research is misleading little picture research, but here’s the kind of supporting evidence we have.

Slide 25: BP Evidence about BPE

Advocacy

Instead of just telling you about advocacy strategies in the abstract, I've tried to model them. So from that list on pages 5 and 6 of your handout, I hope you felt I had #1) Unwavering commitment to the goals we value most for children and the world.

As much as I could in this brief time, I tried to model #2, Understanding healthy development and learning, and #3, a big-picture perspective.

I intentionally and explicitly did #7, grounding this vision for education and society in moral and "American" values and I tried to illustrate #9) how we get fooled about education, including untrustworthy educational research.

I certainly tried to do #6) Re-framing the debates and telling a new story, and we'll dive into that more later.

But there's one more advocacy thing to illustrate before the Q & A, and that takes us to the tree.

Slides 25: Tree

As we reframe the debates and tell a new story, we need to remember to not just snip at the upper branches of the unhealthy test-driven, factory paradigm for education. We need to chop out the limbs, roots, trunk, and seeds too. Two examples:

Slides 26 and 27

Ending line

Post slide 28 for the Q & A