

Our (Not-So-Mainstream) Position about Elementary Education

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Goal

Our view of the goal of elementary education (both at home and at school) is to guide children to be peaceful. That is, we hope that all the children be free from fear and hatred, full of kindness and compassion, and willing to take part in building a peaceful community. Virtually all other areas, including academic ability, are important only in support of cultivating the children's inner peace. If we are preoccupied with *our own* children's "success" with respect to academic and other achievements, this may lead to a lot of suffering in this world.

Motivation

The most important point of education must be to respect students' intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators, such as fear of punishment, attraction to prizes, and winning a competition, would *undermine* their intrinsic motivation. Unfortunately, since the current practice of using extrinsic motivators is so deep-rooted, many teachers and parents are not even aware of their detrimental effects. For example, the systematic use of material rewards employed in PBS/PBIS would ruin students' intrinsic motivation and help encourage obedience, as discussed in Nobo's essay (<http://nobo.komagata.net/pub/Komagata13-PBS.html>). We also believe that learning occurs only when students are in charge. Even various adolescent and youth problems, including drug addiction, seem to stem from excessive control by adults and not letting children practice good decision making on their own.

Homework

Especially at the elementary-school level, we are against homework. Research shows that homework does not enhance students' academic ability at this level. Rather, homework can permanently damage students' inherent interest in the subject by forcing children to do the work when they are not willing. We occasionally say to our daughter, "If you don't feel like doing homework, you don't need to do it. We will write a note to the teacher." Note that by not doing homework, we will accept the consequences (e.g., lower grades or even harsher ones), which are not at all our concern. It seems to be more important to save our daughter's genuine interest in the subject so that when the time comes, she is still willing to learn it with interest.

Standardized Tests

As we believe that high-stake standardized tests are obstacles to students' intrinsic motivation to learn, we are against them. We have been discussing this point with our daughter and she makes a decision on whether to take such tests (she did take those tests in the previous years).

Sample references: *Beyond measure* by Vicki Abeles; *Punished by Rewards* by Alfie Kohn; *World peace and other 4th-grade achievements* by John Hunter

This note is partly based on Nobo's essay: <http://nobo.komagata.net/pub/Komagata13-ElementaryEducation.html>