

## **Eight misunderstandings about education**

1. No, it's not about school. It's about the home. Politicians where I live constantly declare what they are going to do and fix about the schools. "Schools first" is a common slogan. The egg before the chicken is the home. Safety, trust, self-belief, cooperation, ambition, ethics, and all the good things start at home. We must do all we can to support, inform, and encourage a constructive home environment. We must focus more on child care, early childhood education, and parents' education. The foundation comes from the home, something the school cannot fully repair, replace or redo.
2. No, education is not about learning. In its current state, education is about socialization and selection. If education were about learning, we would spend much more time teaching students strategies for learning, studying, and applying their learning to the real world. We don't. We judge, select and isolate. We allow segregation into racial, fiscal, social, and religious groups. Too little is done to train for the all-valuable skill of cooperation and the skills, attitudes, and processes for learning.
3. No, education does not need teachers; it needs mentors. A teacher can teach or explain specific facts and skills. Fine. A mentor helps the students see their future selves, lives, goals, and strategies. A mentor shows possibilities, gives opportunity, provides a balance between freedom and structure, gives feedback, reviews learning progress, trains self-assessment and planning skills, and provides stability and opportunity. Teachers can do this, too, of course, but teacher training needs to focus more on the skill of coaching and mentoring. It's a higher-ranked skill than instructing, even if that is also important.
4. No, schools have less influence than culture and the media, not more. In the "old days," schools were one of the only sources of what we call knowledge. Today we can get information from an incredible array of sources, and with the help of a mentor can turn this into knowledge. One's cultural and aspirational environment greatly impacts motivation, willpower, and how to look for one's "future self." The media is a great distributor of information. Its influence on values is often underestimated. Its content cannot always be trusted. However, it shapes our worldview and, thus, our view of the self and the future.
5. No, education is not about individual talent or effort. Finding talent, strengths, skills, and interests is the key to inspiring and encouraging students and building relationships with students. Yet, the world is almost wholly collaborative; success derived from the ability of people to coordinate their efforts to bring food to the table, build bridges and buildings, solve medical problems, create well-working governments, advance the cause of clean energy, and form the associations, clubs, and groups that build a sense of belonging. Societal development is dependent on high-level coordinated problem-solving by groups. Education should focus more on the skills of cooperation and collective problem-solving achievements rather than focus on individual talent achievement.
6. No, education does not train for democracy. Firstly, most school systems are still autocratic. This is not strange. If you put thirty-five students in a room with one adult, you need order and structure. Managing a democratic classroom and taking in the students' needs, desires, interests, opinions, etc., is a challenging task. If you add on segregation by race, religion, and socio-economic background, you isolate, not integrate and thus hinder the skills needed for collaboration and collective governing. The norm of sending your children to the local school,

trusting their standards and efforts, is being replaced by more and more individual choice schools. This harms the purpose and inner workings of democracy. Successful local public schools are needed to serve the needs of all our citizens.

7. No, education is not about facts and details. You'd think so if you look at the curriculum, study how lessons are structured, and examined how tests and grading work. But if "passing the test" and "getting the grade" take priority over learning how to learn and the appreciation and wonder involved in learning, then the students and teachers focus on the wrong things. Yes, knowledge is accumulated over time. Sometimes the students learn to navigate and often manipulate the school system. Teachers have a significant influence, and lots of helpful learning will take place in the future. Yet there is a lot of forgetting when we focus on details and testing recall of more information. It often detracts from understanding, appreciation, and curiosity. Learning the details happens more easily when you understand the purpose of the topic and learn to ask your own questions.
8. No, testing and grading do not predict the future. Maybe they can predict the student's ability to get decent grades or not at the next level, but they do not predict that well nor predetermine the student's future. What tests and grading do well is affect the student's self-image, aspirations, goals, and view of one's future self – and not always in a good way. Students need feedback, support, advice, strategies, perseverance, stability, and the feeling that adults believe in their potential. We must explore other ways to assess student progress and prepare them for future learning and challenges.