

What if Everyone Was Forced to go to Auto Mechanic School?

Imagine a world in which all kids were sent to auto mechanic school for the first few decades of life.

Some percentage of them, those destined for a future with cars and mechanical problems, would love it. It'd be a great fit for them. They'd spend their time focused on the skills they enjoy and that will bring them value in their careers as mechanics.

For most, it would be wasteful and annoying. They'd spend years and years being prodded into memorizing and repeating facts and tasks that they don't care much for and that bear no resemblance to what they'll do for a career.

Of course, those who grow up to be mechanics would think the whole system is great. They'd be genuinely baffled by people who dislike it or think it should be skipped or scrapped. They'd go on about how valuable all of the skills and habits gained in the system are for life.

You don't have to imagine an educational system like that, because we already have it.

Instead of mechanic school, it's teacher school. And college is professor school.

The entire system, top to bottom, is designed by and for by teachers. All the things learned and methods of learning are valuable nowhere in any part of the real world except the academic professions. The most effective learning happens just from being around things and being in an incentive structure that rewards certain behaviors. School means you spend all your time around educators (and none of it around any other real world professions) and in an incentive system that rewards things they like. So that's exactly what you learn, how to live like an academic. As I've described elsewhere, school is a 16 year apprenticeship for professors.

It's no surprise then that teachers and professors are baffled by people who complain about the fluorescently lit hell of classroom cramming and credential chasing. They loved the whole experience and it taught them all the stuff they needed to succeed in their careers as academics and educators. It's also no surprise that it's such an epic, colossal waste for most people who want to enter other parts of the vast market.

There's nothing bad about auto mechanic school. But it's easy to spot the absurdity of forcing every person to spend 12 or 16 or 20 years in it and telling them it will be valuable no matter their interests, goals, or future career. It's no less absurd to do what we currently do and force everyone to go to professor school for most of their young life.