

Slaving Away in the School Factory

Written by Wendy Priesnitz.

One of the criticisms of families who live as if school doesn't exist is that the kids "aren't doing anything"... or at least not anything they couldn't be doing on the weekends and going to school too. I used to try and convince these people that school is harmful, that not much real learning goes on there, that learning happens best as a by-product of living, and so on. But I've come to realize that it's a no-win argument because the criticism is based on emotion - in this case, resentment - rather than on facts.

You see, the problem is that unschooled kids have fun. They play. They noodle around inside and outdoors, at home and in their communities, messing with projects, indulging their passions, and generally having a good time. These kids are continually demonstrating that learning isn't hard work when it is need- and interest-based, and when the learner is in control...that, in fact, learning (not to mention life) is fun, even exciting. They are showing that there is no need for being processed by means of mostly irrelevant prepared curriculum, stressful tests, or long hours spent listening to boring lectures or memorizing monotonous and out-of-context facts.

Another part of the problem is that many adults feel like they are working longer and harder than ever before. And the message from government and those who want to "fix" our education system is that school kids need to work longer and harder too. Something not working? Then do more of it! Make the school day longer, eliminate recess, get kids into school at three and make 'em stay there until they're eighteen, assign more homework, give more tests, tighten up the factory quality controls.... At the end of the long, miserable process, the sausages kids leave the factory molded to work long and hard, in the same highly structured environments, doing the same boring work.

To compound the problem, the skeptics and resenters are scared to death because those exhausting jobs that they slaved so hard in school for and paid so much tuition to prepare for - and cautioned life learners they wouldn't be suited for - are disappearing. At the same time, it looks like self-motivated, flexible, passionate, creative thinkers are doing just fine. And those are traits that are not well nurtured in the school factory.

The cure, of course, is simple. People can expand the ranks of life learners! They can let their kids quit the factory, begin to enjoy life and learning. Unfortunately, what is simple is often not easy. And I understand that rejecting long-held beliefs and admitting you've been lied to and taken advantage of can take time. And it can be painful. But if you are moving in that direction, please believe that the way to ensure a happy future for your kids is to ensure they have a happy present. Living as if school doesn't exist provides the possibility

for that and much more.

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