



**If during the first five or six years of school, a child earns good grades and high praise without having to make much effort, what are all the things he doesn't learn that most children learn by third grade?**

Susan Assouline, co-author of *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* (2004)

Take a moment to answer this question yourself. Or have your child's educators and administrators answer it. What isn't learned? As you skim over your answers, you may be surprised at the sheer volume. But on closer look, you may be astounded by the depth and weight of those answers – and the impact they make on your child's life.

## WHAT ISN'T LEARNED?

### Work Ethic

*The World is Flat and China, Inc.* remind us how readily Asians are bypassing us technologically, educationally, and economically. One main reason for this lies in their work ethic. They aspire to the middle class lifestyle. They know that education and sacrifice are the paths for getting that. They look at education as a privilege – and it is.

In America (and aren't we proud!), everyone has the right to an education. Sometimes it seems, though, that our

# WHAT A CHILD DOESN'T LEARN...

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young people would argue that everyone has the right to a Nintendo DS with unlimited playing time, a cell phone by 5th grade, and a car by 16. They may also argue they are entitled to an allowance and that days off from school are for relaxation and play and not chores. Experts argue that this will be the first generation whose standard of living will not surpass (or even match) their parents' socio-economic level. This is an entitled generation – or so they think.

Ben Franklin once said, "Genius without education is like silver in the mine." We could alter that a bit for the

21st century American young person: "Genius without work ethic is like silver in the mine." No matter how bright, our children will not succeed personally or professionally without a strong work ethic. Working hard at intellectually stimulating tasks early in their lives helps to develop that ethic.

### Responsibility

Responsibility is conscience driven. We make the choices we do because it is the right thing to do. Dishes must be washed in order to be ready for the next meal. The research paper must be done well and on time if we want that top grade. Punctuality helps us keep our jobs, so even though we choose to stay up until 3:00 am to finish a novel, when the alarm sounds a very short two hours later, we're up. Each day's responsibilities must be met to be a productive family member, employee, and citizen.

Early in life, we should learn the orchestrating role responsibility plays in our lives. And we also should realistically learn the outcomes when responsibilities are not met. It's all about cause and effect. If children do not live up to their responsibilities and if natural consequences are not enforced, we are not equipping children with this vital virtue.

### Coping with Disappointment

Often our greatest lessons in life stem from falling flat on our faces! Through disappointment or failure, we learn how to pick ourselves up and continue. We learn perseverance and resilience. We learn that we're not always right and that we don't need to be – that we may discover more through our failures than we ever imagined we could through our accomplishments!

When we face obstacles early on, we discover how to separate our identities from the task itself – that means the failure of meeting the goal or accomplishing the task does not equal failure of us as people. Young people, especially those who are gifted and talented, must learn to take academic risks. They must learn to celebrate the

outcome and be able to learn from the failure!

### **Self-Worth Stemming from the Accomplishment of a Challenging Task**

We have all faced obstacles that seemed overwhelming, tasks that appeared too challenging. Giving up was never an option, so we worked and struggled and toiled until finally we overcame that obstacle or completed the task. The intrinsic rewards far outweighed the praise or even the pay earned at the end. We felt good about ourselves, our work ethic, our management skills, our persistence, and our ability. And even if the tangible outcome wasn't the promotion or "A" we wanted, that was secondary to the inner sense of accomplishment and pride we felt.

When students never work hard at challenging tasks, they can't experience those intrinsic rewards. Naturally, then, they focus on the extrinsic rewards. By giving them good grades for little effort, we're depriving them of this life-driving tool.

### **Time-Management Skills**

Adults constantly juggle roles: parent, spouse, child, person, employee/employer, volunteer, neighbor, friend, etc. With each role come demands on our time and energy. Often these demands conflict with each other requiring us to budget our time very carefully. Through experience, we have gained time-management skills by keeping track of the responsibilities of each role, estimating the time needed to meet that responsibility, and then following through. We adjust and readjust based on our experiences.

We know how difficult we make our lives when we procrastinate; likewise, we know the sweetness of free time that comes from managing our time well. Young people who don't have to put effort into their work to earn high grades won't understand the time needed in order to do a job that would be acceptable in the work environment. Instead of gradually learning these

lessons in schools, they may very well have crash (and burn) courses in the real world.

### **Study Skills**

Self-discipline, time-management, goal setting – all of these are embedded in study skills. When children don't need to study (because they already know the information or they have the ability to absorb it as they listen in class), they never learn vital study skills. So when they are presented with challenging material, whether that be in their first honors class or, even worse, in college, they simply don't know how to study! How do you attack a lengthy reading assignment? How do you take notes in an organized fashion? How do you prepare for an exam that covers the entire semester's material? Yes, study skills can be learned, but like most things in life, the earlier we acquire those skills, the better.

### **Goal setting**

We can't reach goals if we never set them nor can we reach goals if they are unrealistic. We also can't reach goals if we don't have a strategy in place that incrementally encourages us to meet that end goal. Students must have practice in goal setting and goal achievement. Those skills will impact their personal lives, their professional lives, their social lives, and even their spiritual lives!

### **Decision-Making and Problem-Solving Skills**

Weighing pros and cons. Predicting outcomes of possible choices. Systematically breaking down issues as to importance. Ranking possibilities and importance of criteria. All of these skills come into play when making a decision. All of these skills come into play when problem-solving. If children don't ever have experience with this early on in their learning, then when it is time to make decisions about learning and life, when it is time to solve professional and personal problems, they are ill equipped to do so.

### **Sacrifice**

Yes, I would rather curl up with a wonderful read than dig into my taxes. But if my taxes aren't complete by April 15, I am in trouble. Period. I would rather catch the latest Academy Award winning film than bulldoze the dirty clothes into the laundry room and lose myself for the rest of the day. But wrinkled, dirty clothes don't go very well with a professional image nor do they encourage lunch mates. As responsible adults, we well understand sacrifice. Sometimes we sacrifice our free time for our responsibilities. Sometimes we sacrifice what we want to do because others wish to do something else. We fully understand that we must "pay our dues" in life.

But if young people procrastinate on assignments because they really want to finish the Xbox game or IM their friends while their shoddy work earns A's, they're not learning about real life. Excellence requires sacrifice. The IRS won't care that the reason your taxes were late (and incorrect in just a couple of places) was because you'd rather spend time reading a novel. Your potential employer doesn't even want to hear the excuse of choosing to watch a movie over the preparation of your clothing for the interview. Life's not always about fun or about what you want and when you want it. It's about sacrifice and work ethic. It's about working your hardest at challenging tasks.

*This list is only partial, and yours may well include values that this one didn't. What's particularly frightening with this one is that these are the ingredients for a successful life. What does a child not learn? He doesn't learn the values and skills needed in order to be a productive and caring person who contributes to our world.*

*Sobering, isn't it?*



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