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Prioritizing Skills over Memorization for a Thriving Future

In a world demanding innovation and adaptability, schools find themselves at a crossroads. The old model of cramming knowledge into young minds is unraveling before our eyes. It's time to break free from the chains of mere memorization and embark on a journey that nurtures skills for life. For many years now, schools have failed to understand that feeding their students knowledge and forcing them to commit it to their short-term memory is ineffective in preparing them for their futures. While students need to possess certain knowledge, high schools should undoubtedly focus on building their students' skill sets instead of building their capacity to remember as much information as possible. This means that schools need to decrease memorization-based learning and prioritize hands-on, interactive learning that has some real-world application. Whether through an emphasis on project-based learning or through the integration of more practice and application, schools must address the lack of real-life skills students are taught.

Students do not benefit from absorbing vast quantities of information that has no relevance to their futures. While committing information to memory is necessary in some cases, ultimately, "Memorization stops the student from thinking critically about the topic, and that is not actual learning" (Hadwan). When students only memorize information to do well on their assessments, they remember specific information word for word but do not focus on the meaning or significance of the information, which is often a crucial part of the learning process. For this

reason, it is fair to say that retention of facts does not count as genuine learning. Additionally, memorizing information is challenging for students when they do not know the information's relevance and/or importance. For example, in the article "I Want to Learn, not Just Memorize" written by a student named Alondra Gonzalez, she says, "I have spent countless nights memorizing material, but at the end of the day…I don't know what I'm talking about. Not a clue" (Hadwan). Clearly, Alondra is frustrated because even though she spent a lot of time memorizing, she still does not fully understand the content she is learning. Not just this student, but most students feel this way after spending countless hours studying for a test. Given that the majority of students engage in extracurricular activities after school, they have limited time available for nightly quiz preparation and homework. Since assessments in schools do not test students' understanding of the material, students have no reason to understand the material, and therefore, they prepare for the tests by remembering the facts they were presented because it is the quickest way to earn a sufficient grade. However, others believe that memorization is necessary because it "...significantly aids students' understanding and application of new information learned…the more students know, the more they can learn" (Wormeli). While some memorization is required when trying to understand new information, contrary to what many schools expect from students, every fact presented in class does not need to be committed to memory. Information should only be remembered if it is relevant enough to help with the understanding of the subject matter. Hence, students should be guided away from memorization because, through memorization, the essence of learning is lost.

Memorization is an ineffective learning method; therefore, skill-based education needs to be built into schools because it has a plethora of benefits that will ultimately prepare all students to prosper in their futures. When students enhance their skills, like their communication and

decision-making skills, one of the qualities they develop is leadership: “Students are nurtured in skill-based education to become great leaders in the chosen sector” (21k school). Teaching students the skills that they will need to become leaders in the future is essential in our world where everything is competitive. From internship applications to job interviews, the quality of leadership is highly sought after and often separates an excellent applicant from a good applicant. Therefore, if students are set up to attain leadership qualities in school, they will be more likely to succeed in their chosen career paths. Additionally, “Skill-based education gives students ownership of their learning and helps them close the comprehension gap. The evaluation, rather than grades, proves their proficiency” (21k school). Skill-based education empowers students by allowing them to take responsibility for their learning. While students have a higher chance of failure when they are responsible for their learning, failure is the first step to success. These failures teach the students many lessons, such as adaptability and overcoming challenges, which ultimately accomplish the goal of teaching them the skills they need to have. Highlighting the significance of a skills-based education, it's worth noting that “...providing life skills-based education at a young age helps students prepare for the real world” (21k school). Instead of making students memorize the year that the Western Roman Empire fell, it would be beneficial to teach a student time management skills that would help them structure their days outside of school. Acquiring specific skills and qualities during their early years is crucial for students, as it enables them to establish good habits that will serve them well when they confront the realities of the adult world. Overall, embracing skill-based education will provide students with a foundation to thrive in their futures.

Schools need to eliminate knowledge-building from their curriculums and replace it with project-based learning, as it fulfills the need for skill-building for students in schools.

Project-based learning accomplishes the goal of helping students attain key skills because "Learning via action is also a component of this system for improving the mental process underlying skill improvement" (21k school). Learning through practical application and action is a crucial aspect of skill development. If these practices are integrated into school curriculums, students will learn better because they will be actively engaged with the material. One way to incorporate these practices is through project-based learning. This way, "Students learn how to solve problems that are important to them…" (Shaffer). With project-based learning, students can explore and address problems they are passionate about. For example, at my school, my peers and I are working on a 5-month-long STEM project which we get to choose based on our passions. When students can work on a project they are immensely interested in and passionate about, they get a lot more out of the entire learning process. Also, when doing any project in general, "Students learn to look at problems with a critical thinking lens, asking questions and coming up with possible solutions for their project" (Shaffer). Projects force students to work outside their comfort zone. In most projects, there are continuous hurdles that need to be overcome for a successful final project. For this reason, students become more adept at critical thinking when they are actively engaged in finding solutions. However, others believe that "Low productivity is one of the most common problems with anything that is student-directed" (7 Common). Though it may be true that students sometimes lack productivity when given the responsibility for their learning, when provided the chance to select a project aligned with their interests, they are more inclined to be productive due to their passion for the chosen topic. Additionally, For these reasons, project-based learning needs to be integrated into more schools.

Alongside project-based learning, school's curriculums also need to focus on teaching their students material through practice and application rather than memorization. If students

need skills more than knowledge, and "...skills are acquired through practice and application" (Smith), then schools should push students to understand topics in depth to the point where they can apply their knowledge through implementation. Skill development requires not just passive knowledge acquisition but also active practice and practical application. To encourage students to focus on understanding material rather than memorizing it, assessments should be designed to test their understanding of the topic. For instance, students can be asked more open-ended questions, requiring them to apply their knowledge about their topic to real-world situations. Additionally, "...if you want to better prepare individuals…they don't need more lectures…they need…more practice" (Boulet). Traditional lectures alone do not adequately prepare students for the challenges of the real world. Instead, hands-on exercises are essential to reinforce the information that is taught and allow the student to explore the topic. With more firsthand learning and practice, students are compelled to analyze and evaluate information, which ends up developing critical thinking skills. More specifically, practice in real-world situations is the most beneficial because like Dewey said: "...but, after all, this is somewhat remote and shadowy compared with the training of attention and of judgment that is acquired in having to do things with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead" (Dewey). Learning and skill development for students is most advantageous when they can see a reason for doing something and an outcome for their work. Actually doing things helps students grasp information better, and because they can engage with actual situations, problems, or tasks relevant to the real world, they also develop vital skills. Real-world experiences are not only crucial in developing skills but also in attention and judgment. Oftentimes in life, we encounter tasks that may appear dull, yet they are important obligations, and students need to build an attention span for these tasks. Therefore,

a shift towards emphasizing practice and application in education offers a new and improved approach to learning.

Given these points, the students' need for skill development in schools becomes increasingly clear when considering the limitations of memorization-based learning. By shifting the focus from memorization to hands-on experiences, project-based learning, and practical application, students are better prepared to flourish in the real world. Ultimately, schools should prioritize preparing students for success by equipping them with the skills they will need to overcome the challenges they encounter in their future endeavors.

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