

1. Reform Society

You cannot have good schools in a bad society. Good schools require supported teachers, teachers who have professional responsibility (not punitive accountability). Good schools also require high levels of equality and civic participation in society. We have neither of these in the U.S. today. Schools cannot save society, but society can save schools.

2. Forget Jobs

Most of the jobs in a developed country are service jobs. Today workers have lost unions, wages, and benefits, but gained in productivity. They largely exist to be exploited for profit and stock prices. Further, the shape of jobs, the job market, and the world changes so fast today—and is in such crisis—that no school or college knows enough to “train” students for jobs. Schools should make people smart (see below).

3. Get “Grit”

The most important “skill” a young person can acquire for success in school and society is “grit”. I define “grit” as the ability to use motivation, interest, and passion to persist past failure to gain lots and lots of practice in a domain important to the learner and to society.

4. Ensure Experience

Humans learn through experiences in the world (using their minds, bodies, emotions, and relationships and interactions with others, as well as with smart tools and technologies). They do not learn through experiences in classrooms or books, unless these experiences are based on experiences in the world. The words in classrooms and books are given real meaning by the actions, goals, experiences, and problems to which they are attached—and by which they are given real meaning—in the physical and social world. Classrooms should not be a bunch of game manuals without the games.

5. Build Learning Systems

Technologies, including literacy, are tools meant to serve learning, problem solving, and actions and interactions in the world. Technologies are not good or bad and not important in their own right. They are good only when used as tools within larger well-designed learning and problem-solving systems, systems which are never based on one tool or technology, but on a well-integrated set of tools, technologies, interactions, and practices.

6. Supersize Minds

In our complex, high-risk, fast changing, global world individual intelligence and individual narrow experts acting on their own are dangerous. The modern world is full of complex systems, complex problems, and dangers that require that we super-size minds. Extended Minds are systems where individuals are networked with each other and with good tools and technologies in good environments so they leverage different forms of knowledge for collective intelligence in the service of good.

7. Teach Self Defense

Our society today is filled with scams, cheating, greed, and exploitation. Inequality is at an all-time high and governments and corporations operate only in terms of short-term interests. People need to know how to avoid being duped by the rich, the powerful, and the greedy.

8. Produce Producers

The Maker Movement and the plethora of interest- and passion-driven spaces on the Internet and in the world give many more people the power to make, produce, and participate than ever before, even outside the strictures of institutions, experts, and formal credentials. Producing and proactively participating are core self-protection skills.

9. Teach Students How to Count

Societies, like ours, that are full of people who feel they do not count, that they are not agents, and that what they do does not really matter to their society have poor health. This is true both for the rich and the poor in a highly unequal society. In a developed country not everyone can gain their primary sense of agency and of counting via a job. But they can still gain a sense of agency and counting outside of work in civic participation and as members of interest- and passion-driven affinity spaces.

10. Encourage Failure

Failure is crucial to learning. If the cost of failure is not too high, it allows people to take risks, innovate, try new styles, and quickly “map the maze” to solve problems. History has made it clear that no matter how many times someone has failed in or out of school, the “game” is not over until it’s over. Never ever count anyone out—you will look bad as a footnote in the biography that lionizes them after they are dead.