



The Global Achievement Gap: Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship—and What We Can Do About It

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Despite the best efforts of educators, our nation's schools are dangerously obsolete. Instead of teaching students to be critical thinkers and problem-solvers, we are asking them to memorize facts for multiple choice tests. This problem isn't limited to low-income school districts: even our top schools aren't teaching or testing the skills that matter most in the global knowledge economy. Our teens leave school equipped to work only in the kinds of jobs that are fast disappearing from the American economy. Meanwhile, young adults in India and China are competing with our students for the most sought-after careers around the world. Education expert Tony Wagner has conducted scores of interviews with business leaders and observed hundreds of classes in some of the nation's most highly regarded public schools. He discovered a profound disconnect between what potential employers are looking for in young people today (critical thinking skills, creativity, and effective communication) and what our schools are providing (passive learning environments and uninspired lesson plans that focus on test preparation and reward memorization).

He explains how every American can work to overhaul our education system, and he shows us examples of dramatically different schools that teach all students new skills. In addition, through interviews with college graduates and people who work with them, Wagner discovers how teachers, parents, and employers can motivate the "net" generation to excellence.

An education manifesto for the twenty-first century, *The Global Achievement Gap* is provocative and inspiring. It is essential reading for parents, educators, business leaders, policy-makers, and anyone interested in seeing our young people succeed as employees and citizens.

For additional information about the author and the book, please go to www.schoolchange.org

The Global Achievement Gap: Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship—and What We Can Do About It Details

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From Reader Review The Global Achievement Gap: Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship—and What We Can Do About It for online ebook

Aaron Maurer says

The title pretty much sums up the book. I began reading this book over the summer. I was about 1/3 of the way through and decided to stop reading the book and return it to the library. Why? Because there was so much great content that I was spending more time writing out my notes than actually reading the book.

I recently purchased the book for my iPad so I could highlight and type my notes. This proved a much more productive method (and lead me to a thought on education practices) and allowed me to not only take away key passages, but also allowed for fluid reading.

There is so much great info in this book. As I currently help operate an online global project with 600+ elementary students, I found many things in this book to hold merit and raise valid questions about education. Combine this with my recent visit to High Tech High (which was included in the book) and not only understand the need for some change to education, but demand it to happen. The great thing is that change is happening.

Essentially, the author discusses 7 Essential Survival Skills that all students need.

Wagner presents seven "survival skills" that students should be learning in school in order to prepare for college and adult life:

- * Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- * Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence
- * Agility and Adaptability
- * Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
- * Effective Oral and Written Communication.
- * Accessing and Analyzing Information
- * Curiosity and Imagination

Throughout the book he examines how these skills are being taught on the global scale and how much America has fallen behind the ranks in these skills. What is so great about his rhetoric and writing style is that it is not an all out bash on American schools. Being a teacher myself I have read plenty where teachers are just ripped apart. He focuses more on where things are going wrong and providing examples of schools that are on the right path to making change.

The skills shared here are all skills that everyone needs for whatever avenue of life they choose. Some parents and students are stuck in schools that they cannot escape. The great thing with these skills are that they can be taught at home.

Staying current with the development and changes in education I think things are moving in the right direction. I teach at a fantastic school and we even realize that changes need to be made.

I recommend this book to anyone who has an investment in education (which is pretty much everyone). You

will walk away from this book with a better understanding of what is needed for our students and nation to get back to the top.

I will be using my 23 pages of notes for future blog posts on education, but since this is a review of the book I will save those rants for another day. A must read education book.

Alex T. says

I shared many quotes and thoughts from this book on my Facebook account. In general, I love Dr. Wagner's emphasis on his Seven Survival Skills and the understanding that our education system needs to be reinvented and reimagined in order to reflect the needs of 21st century learners, workers, and citizens. I also appreciate his call for more effective assessments that are performance- and portfolio-based over the typical multiple-choice recall assessments that have been used for decades. There are some conclusions he draws that I disagree with, but he addresses some in his postscript to the afterword. All in all, a quality book that has made me think more about my role as an educator in leading students to the kind of independent learning that will allow them to be successful members of an ever-changing society.

Deb Christenson says

We are reading this book as mandatory summer reading for my school. It details what's wrong with most schools and how to get it right. Wagner affirms for me what I believe in educational best practices: highly recommended!

Erin McDonnell-Jones says

My notes:

-Definition of critical thinking: "taking issues and situations and problems and going to root components; understanding how the problems evolved--looking at it from a systemic perspective and not accepting things at face value. It also means being curious about why things are the way they are and being able to think about why something is important" (p. 16)

- "...you need to start teaching critical thinking as soon as children are capable of abstract thinking" (p. 17)

-Critical thinking means asking good questions!

-7 Skills Kids Need to Succeed:

- (1) Critical Thinking
- (2) Collaborating across Networks/Leading by Influence
- (3) Agility and Adaptability
- (4) Initiative and Enthusiasm
- (5) Effective Written & Oral Communication
- (6) Accessing and Analyzing Information
- (7) Curiosity and Imagination

"Kids know how to pass the test [AP, state, national], but they don't know how to observe" (p. 45)

Positives: he immediately relays his own biases in any observation he offers, including the introduction to why he wrote the book

-Ch 4 on Teacher Prep: too much on his own experiences--but he offers an interesting metaphor that administrative programs are roughly the same style of high school courses. Students take "disjointed courses" and then a test to prove their worth.

"You cannot run a modern education system with the idea that someone decides what's taught and then tells teachers what do to. Take Finland, for example. The system there is highly selective in hiring teachers, and the best people come into the profession not because they pay well but because of attractive incentives and working environment" (p. 152).

Wagner's recommendations for adapting methods of learning and teaching (p. 257-8):

- (1) All students needs new skills to thrive in a global knowledge economy.
- (2) In the age of the Internet, using new information to solve new problems matters more than recalling old information.
- (3) Today's youth are differently motivated when we compare them to previous generations.
---"They're curious multitaskers who hunger for immediate gratification and connectedness. They need and value mentoring and coaching from older adults, but only when those adults are respectful of their abilities and their dreams and can relate authentically" (p. 258)

Wagner's recommendations for what makes good schools/classrooms (p. 258-9):

- (1) Learning and assessment focused
--Lifelong learning focused
- (2) Student motivation
--Students are motivated through (1) adults that have a close relationship to students. (2) Opportunities for students to explore their questions and interests are a driving force for learning. (3) Learning is hands-on and more personalized.
- (3) School Accountability and Teacher Development
--Schools hold themselves collectively accountable for quality student work and student success in college and beyond.

Lauren Sterling says

I'm very delayed in sending out this review. I read this book back in 2009, and had the good fortune of then engaging Tony Wagner to come to Maine to keynote an education conference at the time the state's leadership was changing. Oddly, the Maine Education Commissioner tried to embrace the book/author's recommendations, but was blocked at every turn by Governor LePage. That being said, this book takes the research from enormous studies that identified the seven specific skills missing in our emerging high school graduates and offers solutions or rather pathways for how to reverse that trend. You won't be surprised to know that the skills gap have nothing to do with math, English, science (STEM)or any other curricular content. Read this book if you wish to understand why effective teaching that involved hands-on coaching, mentoring, and relational-based instruction won't happen through "virtual schools" alone.

Jonna Higgins-Freese says

I'm a little weary of apocalyptic rhetoric in every genre, so I approached this with a skeptical eye. The author outlines "seven survival skills" for the future that every child should learn, and honestly, that kind of thing is always intellectually difficult for me to grasp, and seems very amorphous: critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks, etc.

More helpful to me were the notes from the "learning walks" the author conducts at various schools, where he provided specific examples of what different kinds of teaching look like. Of course, the best examples were not those where students were passively sitting in their seats copying maps from the textbook onto a paper, or listening to a teacher drone through overheads about the causes of the Spanish-American war. Instead, the most learning occurred when students were researching, writing, creating -- and receiving constant in-process feedback on how to improve their work. He describes a board listing questions for discussion (things we want to know about Darfur: how do we know who supports the rebels? Are oil and tobacco motivations in Darfur?") Students are preparing for a "Camp Darfur" night, where tents will include presentations for their parents on genocides that have occurred over the past hundred years. Students use catapults and ping-pong balls to hypothesize about trajectory and distance and derive formulas for physics. The best teachers were facilitators and coaches, helping students develop their skills and move to the next level. Students used AutoCAD to recreate the ship in the voyage of the Beagle, which was then displayed in a museum. Some students worked on a project to write a book about every animal who lived in the bay--that's now for sale in the aquarium gift shop. They participated in a mock trial of Harry Truman for his decision to use the atomic bomb, in which each student took the part of a major player in the decision, researched his position, and presented it. In one school, the teacher participated in PE. Students in Spanish watch a video on a cocaine eradication program with questions on a worksheet like "How has the fumigation program affected the cocaine market? Evidence?" A student designs a menu for living in a weightless environment after studying the nutritional needs created by weightlessness.

He points out that AP tests which are required to "cover" a certain amount of "knowledge" may have made sense when knowledge was scarce, but no longer do when the most important skill is "the ability to ask the right questions." (111) He gives an example about the silliness of learning the parts of speech, because "there is no research which (sic, ironically) shows that knowing the parts of speech is necessary for learning to write well" (111). Instead, Wagner suggests that "studying academic content is the *means* of developing competencies, instead of being the goal, as it has been traditionally. In today's world, it's no longer how much you know that matters; it's what you can do with what you know" (111).

Parenthetically, I was probably most interested in his reference to two books about the value of gaming for learning, in which he cites evidence that video games "emphasize independent problem solving and the rapid acquisition of technical skills" and that video games force players to think like scientists.

Azat Sultanov says

There was nothing new in it for me but I gave it 5 stars nonetheless as it was published as far back as 2008 and I figure it must have been pretty eye-opening at the time.

Basically, the idea of the book is as follows: if you are expected to drive well, you need to spend more time actually driving rather than learning different car parts by heart.

21 century has its own required set of skills to be "successful". School experience is detached from the

reality and in no way prepares for life. Teachers are not coached properly. Teaching for tests kills everything. Assessment needs to be changed to reflect new requirement.

Wagner talks about 7 survival skills to be developed in school.

Brian Ayres says

I found this book to be extremely repetitive and highly disappointing. While I do not have all the answers and certainly agree with Wagner's stance on the lack of "rigor" in over-hyped Advanced Placement factories in the suburbs, Wagner continuously went back to the question: W.D.CEOs.W. That is: "What do CEOs want?" as if CEOs of major corporations are the epitome of Wagner's seven survival skills for teens today. It is comical to read -- though not surprising seeing Wagner is a member of the foundation-movement that funds much of educational experimentation today -- how CEOs are lecturing us all about how stupid public-school educated kids are. Were these not the same jokers who gambled tens of trillions of dollars away in the course of a few years? Though they were persuasive enough to milk the taxpayers on both ends of the financial collapse. Must have done well on the new CLA exams college are offering as exit exams.

Ironcially, CEOs want smart employees but need dumb consumers to buy their junk products and financial services.

Wagner is a pure capitalist in the same way Glenn Beck is a pure capitalist. He packages ideas together (rigor, critical thinking, agility), sells them to an audience (in this case both CEOs and education leaders) and profits from it. Although unlike Beck, who is intentionally destructive in his language and probably doesn't believe half of what he says, Wagner at least cares about what he is talking about, but I find it to be disingenuous. On one hand, he talks about needing teachers to be smart and analytical about their craft. Then on the other hand he lamented that one of this subjects in his book, who could have been a scientist, instead become a lowly teacher. Don't we need smart teachers to teach kids these skills?

Joe Wood says

A great book anyone should read. I purposely say anyone, because all of us shape the schools in our communities. Wagner does a great job of calling out just why our schools desperately need to change for the better to meet the demands of the 21st century economy. I use this book so much the pages are starting to fall out.

Ryle Kiser says

An extremely engaging book that addresses a topic in a manner that the leaders of this country really need to consider the direction that educational reform needs to follow. Too much testing to assess student comprehension levels that do not even provide information that is reliable. Tony Wagner does an excellent job in providing guidance that all educators could follow to provide a positive educational experience for all the students.

Nshslibrary says

Many American students would expect the United States to be a leading country in healthcare and education but in fact the United States is ranked 17th in educational performance in the world.

The education system is faulty at its core since it is stuck in a trance teaching to the methods that were developed for the past. Nowadays employers are expecting students who know and can fluidly use the seven survival skills. These skills are proven to be necessary in the book by Tony Wagner, *The Global Achievement Gap*. This book looks at how the schools are using multiple choice tests designed by the state to see where their students are on their literacy and mathematical skills. The problem with many of these test as Wagner puts it is “these tests do not indicate whether a student is ready for college even if they achieved a passing score” As I was reading this book I agreed with many of Wagner’s points. As a high school student I often feel that that the class is just teaching for the final test. It is not just Wagner who believes that the schools are not preparing their students adequately for high education. In the documentary *Waiting for Superman* the film mentioned the unreliability of state tests since they are incredibly skewed and often solely prepared for during the year.

As mentioned earlier the new skills needed for the future aren’t test taking but the seven survival skills. These skills are in high demand by employers because students with these skills know how to work with a team, problem solve, communicate with others and are curious to learn. Wagner spends a chapter interviewing successful business leaders on what they look for in their employees, and each one responded with the seven skills. In a study of elementary schools funded by the National Health Institute researchers concluded their research with this “In a course of 20 minutes the majority is spent watching the teacher do problems or working on a worksheet alone with minimal feedback. Few opportunities were provided to work in small groups and work on analytical skills.” This form of teaching which is very linear and focused on math and English is due to the “No Child Left Behind” Law. Due to this law schools are tested every year on these skills and many receive the needs improvement standard. This is why Wagner says the state tests can be questioned for their effectiveness. The school’s focus all their time and money on the two subjects tested while cutting out the classes and skills that prepare students for post education.

The documentary *Waiting for Superman* blames the failing schools as the fault of the teachers. Although it may seem logical to blame the teachers who have proven failures, it is not justified to blame all teachers for the failing students. It can’t be the fault of the teachers themselves since their training is mainly consisted of the core classes such as English, history and math. When Wagner interviewed dozens of teachers they all said “With very few courses that teach how to be effective teachers and none on how to be a change -leader or even to supervise teachers effectively.” Without the proper skills teachers can’t be expected to do their job effectively. Wagner explains a major reason why schools fail is due to the faculty’s lack of understanding for the current challenges in schools and classrooms. This book provides extensive proof for the need to change the current way our education system is run. It should be important for everyone to understand that passing the test is not enough. I recommend this book for anyone who wants to do more for their education.

~ Student Review: Daniel H.

Vilo says

Excellent book on how our 19th century approach to school does not truly prepare students for the lives they will lead. The author is talking about ALL students from the most exclusive preparatory schools to the

lowest urban or rural schools. School was designed to create good followers--students who could carry out instructions in the working world. Today's fast-moving competitive environment requires very different skills. Students need to think, they need to collaborate, and they need to have the freedom and encouragement to innovate and solve problems.

Michael says

Great critique of modern education.

Erin says

Interesting book. I am a high school teacher and I wholeheartedly agreed with half of it. I see more truth in his critique of problems with the teaching profession than I relate to his observation of high school classrooms.

Wagner's main point, and the one I both agree with and struggle with, is that students need to be thinking critically and collaborating in all their classes. I work to incorporate collaboration into my classes, and try to include as much critical thinking as I can. It is often hard to generate the compelling, open-ended questions and student assessments that Wagner cites in his examples of schools that work. Where I find the tension is between devoting the time to developing those deep questions with students and covering the content students are expected to know for their college classes (which are not focused on his "seven critical skills" at all). Even the collaboration I do insist on in my classes disappears at the college level (as students love to point out when I assign group projects or assign teams for in-class activities). I think he gives colleges too much of a free pass. From my experience mentoring high school students in classes at our local community college, many of the points he makes about high school are more true at the college level.

One of major points of the book, and one that is not supported by my personal experience, is Wagner's view that high schools are too focused on memorization. I've only worked at three high schools, and they may be exceptions, but both the classes I've taught and the student work I've seen for other classes has been minimally focused on memorization. In my chemistry class, I have students memorize 40 common element symbols and around 35 vocabulary words over the course of the school year (about one a week), and even those are used in context and clearly aligned to other objectives. Our school does not offer AP classes (instead encouraging students to enroll in actual college classes), so that could partially explain the difference in emphasis.

Another point Wagner makes too much of is that academic content is constantly changing, and changing rapidly. He's very hung up on whether there are eight or nine planets, but at least for science, Pluto's "demotion" is the exception that proves the rule. While the Periodic Table students see in chemistry grows slowly (at around the pace new particle colliders are constructed), the elements I have students memorize are not in constant flux. It would make more sense to think of physical science as an expanding pool of knowledge. While changes are occurring on the shoreline, much of the knowledge students are learning in high school is in the very center. It's important for students to see the changes on the edges (Higgs boson-type stuff) to know that interesting science is still being done, but Wagner needs to recognize that there are core sets of principles students can learn that are not in danger of becoming instantly obsolete.

An interesting aside, he mentions is the idea of "bubble students" - how teachers are asked to identify students that can be "moved" to the next proficiency band and focus efforts on them. My principal demands a list of 10 students from each teacher at the start of the year. I compliantly submit it and never look at it again. This little glimpse of school life rang totally sad and true for me.

I generally agreed with the issues Wagner cites in the teaching profession - specifically the lack of collaboration, the pointless time-theft of faculty meetings as they are currently structured, and the lack of meaningful feedback from administrators. While neither of the two teacher preparation programs I participated in (long story) were quite as useless as Wagner's, they were each at least 1/2 useless. I emphatically agree with his point that video critiques of teaching are an especially meaningful way to get feedback on the art of teaching - although they can be painful to watch too. I did three in my first teacher prep program but none in my second.

Interestingly, the work the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is doing with teacher evaluations, that Wagner cites glowingly, has had a profound negative effect on my satisfaction in the teaching profession. "Checkbox - All Satisfaction" ratings have been replaced with cruel, punitive, and even more useless "Approaching Effective" ratings. As I've repeatedly told my "peer reviewer", switching reviews from "pointless" to "cruel and pointless" makes my likely decision to leave the profession much easier. I've worked at Capital One and GE, two organizations that claim to aggressively manage performance, and I have never been upset and demoralized by a review process like in Denver Public Schools.

I do like that Wagner does not take the easy way out and blame teachers unions exclusively. Unions are a problem, but my general experience has been that administrator incompetence unfortunately necessitates an incompetent counterbalance. (I could go into a tirade about the five terrible principals I've endured in my three years of teaching, but suffice it to say it's worse than you can probably imagine in every way. A few assistant principals have been exceptions, but not many of those either...) Surprising, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has been notably silent on principal evaluation.

Wagner's book is thought-provoking and engaging even though I didn't agree with all his points. The skills he lists are important and the questions he asks after learning walks are great questions for reflective teachers to ask themselves. Maybe one day we'll even have time to ask them of each other during faculty meetings, assuming our lists of "bubble students" have been properly submitted to our principals of course. :)

Phillip says

This is a fine read. But if you are in the market for a much better book on education then read *Class Warfare* by Steven Brill.

The book is strange in some ways. For example, Wagner goes off on brief and random tangents about global warming that had nothing to do with the topic. Wagner also ignores a lot research that Brill tackles in *Class Warfare*. There is good stuff in *The Global Achievement Gap*, but your time is better spent on something else.
