



# HEADLINES

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## What's worth knowing?

When I was a young teacher, the department head of math showed me his "Bible". It was a series of laminated lesson plans for every course in the math programme. "I never have to plan another lesson", he said, "and someday, this will be you." "If that day ever comes", I replied, "I'll shoot myself." (I was young, and not the charming and politic person that you know today!)

Needless to say, the prospect of repeating the same embalmed lessons over and over for decades was a discouraging view of the future and not a particularly stimulating career plan. Like most teachers of my generation, I began to look for an alternative path.

Around the same time, many educators were beginning to question the time honoured, textbook based approach to managing the process of student learning. Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, in their groundbreaking book *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, wrote in 1969 :

*Suppose all of the syllabi and curricula and textbooks in all of the schools disappeared...then suppose that you decided to turn this 'catastrophe' into an opportunity to increase the relevance of schools. What would you do? We have a possibility for you to consider: suppose that you decide to have the entire 'curriculum' consist of questions. These questions would have to be worth seeking answers to not only from your point of view but, more importantly, from the point of view of the students."*

As noted above, Postman and Weingartner posed this radical suggestion in 1969. Almost a half a century later, we are still discussing the same thing—what's worth knowing?

We live in an age of competing curricula. You can't pick up the paper or enter into a discussion on schooling without someone extolling the virtues of some system or another (IGCSE, IB, AP, Montessori, Froebel, Waldorf—there are about as many models as there are schools!). When you get right down

to it though, what is really is about is effective teaching, and productive learning.

What's worth knowing? When I taught history there was an on-going debate between the student-centred process guys like me and the "history is a story" crowd. For them, my scattergun approach of allowing students to delve deeply into some topics and skip others altogether was historical sacrilege. Before I pat myself too soundly on the back though, I have to admit that I didn't really know what I was doing! My students were engaged, and they learned lots of stuff, but if you asked me what my essential questions, critical concepts, and desired outcomes were, I would have struggled to articulate them.

The fact is, everything that you do, must be tied directly into important student outcomes. Time in school is too precious to be wasted on irrelevancies and we have to design our programmes, our assessments and our teaching and learning strategies to focus on answering the key questions across every discipline and grade level.

Good teachers do a lot of these things intuitively. Great teachers do them deliberately.

With thoughtful planning and reflection, we can continue to transform ourselves, our students, and the school from good to great. We can help our students to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge to tackle the essential questions in life.

The variance and evolution in their answers across disciplines and over time are a true measure of our success as educators—the only catch is, we just have to know what's worth knowing!



The M2s and M3s heading for Paris last week.

## COMING EVENTS

**Welcome Back  
Barbecue**  
September 23rd

**MYP  
Meet the Teacher**  
September 27th

**PTA Meeting**  
September 27th

**Yearbook  
Photo Week**  
October 3rd-7th