

The Education Series: "Nothing Great Was Ever Achieved Without Enthusiasm"

David Kristofferson from The Highlands · 2 Feb 2016

© 2016 David Kristofferson: <http://www.kristutoring.com>

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

"If you don't know where you're going, you probably won't get there." - the unfortunately late Yogi Berra

except that sometimes...

"Even a blind squirrel finds a nut now and then." - Rocket J. Squirrel aka "Rocky"

This installment of my posts is in many ways the most critical one and the prerequisite to the rest. We need to know where we are going and what is our purpose in education.

Right now, all too often, it appears to be to subject our children to an exhaustive series of ever-higher hurdles to see who has the talent and stamina to persist, make it to the Ivy League or Stanford, start a company/get an extremely high paying job, and live the "lifestyles of the rich and famous."

First, let me clarify that there is nothing wrong with wanting to go to a great school. Cal Tech was my dream, and I did well enough in high school that I could have gone there, but for financial reasons (and the Vietnam War turmoil at UC Berkeley, my second choice) went to Revelle College at UC San Diego which was advertising itself as "Cal Tech South."

Let me repeat this for emphasis - I wanted to go to Cal Tech because I loved science and it was one of the most exciting places to be in science.

The problem that I am trying to address in this series is not the desire to go to a great school, it is the system that has evolved to select applicants.

I went to a California public high school in Newbury Park, CA in the days before Proposition 13 (late 60's to early 70's). There were *NO* AP classes. The "smart kids" were in "college prep" which is now the name for less challenging classes! Despite this apparently appalling lack of rigor, I received a great education, loved going to school, had many excellent teachers, and was not getting by on 4-5 hours of sleep a night after doing a ton of homework. I did have a lot of homework, but it was manageable because we were not trying to get through the volume of material that schools teach now.

As a result, I actually learned something and liked doing it !!!

Somewhere along the way, government became "the problem, not the solution," and people no longer wanted to pay high taxes (I believe my father's tax rate was 70%+ (!) in the mid-60s, and yet the US and CA

economies were booming; we built up massive infrastructure and also the University of California system). Per-pupil spending on CA public schools plummeted to near the bottom of the nations's state rankings.

Fast forward to one of my recent tutoring sessions... (to be continued)