Improving

Schools should give real-life assignments

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HOMESCHOOLED

Your science class studies real science. You're not too far from the ocean, so your class goes down to the beach to study marine biology. Then you return to the classroom and analyze your experiments mathematically. You find from your study that pollution in the environment is hurting the ecosystem. You attend real-world meetings about this issue and persuade local decision-makers to clean up the environment. Then in English class, your class writes persuasive essays about the issue and sends them to the local newspaper and even to the White House. You are learning not only the school subjects, but you are also learning about the real world and real careers.

This is real-world learning. Kids get involved in relevant issues and even make a difference. This is not busy work. It's more fun than sitting in a classroom and listening to a teacher lecture for an hour. In most schools, the subjects are taught separately. There is no connection between the science lesson and the math lesson, for example. Kids don't learn that their math has anything to do with their social studies. Schools should not separate subjects.

Far too many kids hate math and science. No wonder this is true—kids don't see the purpose in math and science. Math should always be applied to real situations. Students could participate in microeconomic simulation, which is just a simulation of the real economy. They could collect data and analyze it, and then share it with other classes or even the entire world. That could involve all kinds of math; if you wanted to get really into it, you could even do calculus about it.

Students should do math about everything—the economy, their science experiments, statistics, and even their parents' finances.

Like math, writing is everywhere. It is sad so many schools teach writing so poorly. Good writing goes with every other subject. Kids can write about their science experiments. They can write essays about their observations from the data they collected. Kids can even enter fiction and poetry contests and win money and recognition. They should be allowed more freedom in what they write about. Which is more fun: writing an essay on a topic that your teacher assigns, such as "What I love about my teacher," or writing an essay on your favorite topic, like sea slugs or Thailand or art or your friend's carnivorous plant or Jupiter?

Of course, schools could not have 40 to 50 students in a class with this system. Class sizes would have to be much smaller. This would give kids more individualized attention. Classes should be formed according to ability. Teachers say that this hurts the feelings of the lower achievers, but it would help them improve more quickly and make a difference in the world. They would start to feel better about themselves. This might even reduce the number of dropouts.

Individualizing the curriculum, pulling subjects together, and teaching real-world issues would help kids learn faster and more about real life, and would help them to be independent learners. It would even make school more fun.

This is how school should be. I am homeschooled, and I have experienced some of this real-world learning in my curriculum. Real-world learning makes kids more independent learners. It also erases some of the boredom inflicted on kids by lectures and busy work. Kids learn that school is not about long lectures and busy work, but about learning. It teaches more than just reading, writing and math; kids learn cooperation, independent thinking, the power of persuasion, and most importantly, that learning happens everywhere, all the time. It has meaning and influences the students to find opportunities to learn throughout their lives.