

Oregon High School Discovers Hidden Benefits in Shop Class

Have you ever looked at the range of courses your child can take in high school and had the sense that something was missing?

For many parents, that missing item is one that was a favorite course in high school: shop class.

The reasons for the disappearance of shop class are simple: high stakes testing causes schools to seek extra time for academic basics like reading and math, while the push to send everyone to college has minimized the importance of the hands-on skills that shop class teaches.

In spite of these objections, shop class still exists in many schools, and one high school in Oregon is taking the concept to a whole new level. According to the [Associated Press](#), instructor Josh Gary is not only teaching his high school students how to work with their hands, but is also training them to pass on their new-found skills to younger students:

“The idea for the program came together after Gary and his wife, Quinn, a fourth-grade instructor at West School, discussed the possibility of high school students mentoring elementary school students for fun.

On Wednesday, Gary’s wife brought her fourth-grade class to the wood shop, where about 20 high school students showed about 25 fourth-graders how to build their own personal step stools in one period and then take them home.”

According to Gary, the sessions have been helpful for both groups of students. The younger ones are gaining new experiences and the fun of doing hands-on projects. The older

ones, Gary notes, learn the skills better themselves by having to teach them to others. Such teaching gives the older students responsibility, keeps them engaged, and helps build their communication skills.

The success of Gary's shop class experiment brings to light some key aspects of education that we've forgotten in today's schools.

The first, and most obvious, is the potential that basic skills instruction can bring to students. Many of them can navigate a handheld digital device without a second thought, but a handheld saw is a different matter. Are we hindering students' ability to be creative, problem-solving individuals whose knowledge goes beyond the information they can look up online when we remove courses like shop class from schools?

The second concerns the benefits a multi-age system of education can bring. As even nature demonstrates, the current, age-segregated system upon which America's schools are structured is not normal. Families, workplaces, and communities are all based upon a system of multiple ages; school is not. By clinging to the age-segregated system in America's schools, are we denying students the option for greater joy, responsibility, and learning opportunities?

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