



## **What's the Point of School?: Rediscovering the Heart of Education**

*Guy Claxton*

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What's the Point of School? takes the reader beyond the sterile debates about City Academies and dumbed-down exams in order to reveal the key responsibility of education today: to create students who enjoy learning. With their emphasis on stressful exams and regurgitation of information, Guy Claxton claims that schools are currently doing more harm than good, primarily making students fear failure. Instead, schools must encourage students to develop their curiosity, ask stupid questions, and think for themselves. He explains scientists' latest theories about how the human brain learns, and reveals some of the core habits needed to create a strong, supple mind. He then goes on to explain how these are already being successfully implemented in some schools - all without chucking out Shakespeare or the Periodic Table. Professor Guy Claxton is one of the UK's foremost thinkers on creativity, learning and the brain in both business and education. He is Professor of the Learning Sciences at the University of Bristol, and the author and editor of over 20 books on learning and creativity.

## What's the Point of School?: Rediscovering the Heart of Education Details

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## **From Reader Review What's the Point of School?: Rediscovering the Heart of Education for online ebook**

### **Hidayah Bani says**

Finally I rate this book 4 stars even though I really amazed with the content of this book. There is no problem with this book as it stimulate me to think and reflect upon what I have done, why I did it and what is my plan as a teacher (with my professional judgement).

How I found Guy Claxton as an inspiring person?

I found him when I reflected on my journey as a learner during my schooling time. There was a time when I resigned from a boarding school in order to prove that (1) school prestige is not the sole indicator of my future (2) An excellent examination result cannot guarantee us a bright future. Indeed, what I thought in my schooling time has been proven by him and the word that fit with my thought is 'resilience'.

Anyway, the past is the past. This inspiring book that stimulated my critical thought can be just 'a book that has 244 pages' if I don't have any critical & creative practices. A good thought may become a random idea if a person don't have creative practice.

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### **Elliot says**

If you are an educator or parent you must read this.

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### **Lily says**

I would like to hand a copy of this book to every teacher. Hugely inspirational. Favourite quote: 'just in time learning not just in case'.

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### **Megan says**

This book is a great starting point for a discussion and critique of our current education system in the western world. In simple and straightforward language Claxton voices what almost every educator is surely thinking but feels helpless to do anything about: that **WHAT** we teach in schools is becoming increasingly irrelevant compared to **HOW** we teach it. It is a well researched and logically ordered case he puts forward and if nothing else is a great stimulus for further discussion on what can be done to improve the passivity that exists in both teachers and students in many schools. Definitely got me thinking and inspired further investigation

as to how this could look in my own school!

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### **Hannah says**

I stumbled upon this book by chance (someone mentioned the name and my curiosity got the best of me) but I am so glad I did. Claxton's thoughts regarding the state of education today are, in my mind, game-changing and I hope to be able to implement some of his ideas in my classroom.

Straight on to 'Building Learning Power' for me!

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### **Nathan says**

Claxton's thesis is simple: industrial education isn't working, and in fact is teaching kids compliance and passivity--what's needed is a focus on teaching kids how to learn. This isn't news here in NZ, though it might be elsewhere. The first part of the book lays out the problem with plenty of quotes from real people.

At a conference recently a headteacher approached me, keen to tell me a story. The previous evening she had been chatting to her daughter, a bright young woman doing some last minute revision for her A levels. She asked her daughter what she thought she had really learned from her schooldays. The daughter thought for a bit and said: "Be nice to the hard kids." Her mother suggested that there must be more than that. The daughter thought some more and then said: "Yes, I've learned I'm not very clever." Telling me this story, the headteacher said: "And I could have wept." She thought it was a tragedy that this perfectly intelligent young woman should think that a sense of her own inadequacy was the second most important thing she would take away from her education.

and

The findings of a MORI poll carried out for the Campaign for Learning in 2000, 2002, and 2004 could reveal part of the problem. The poll asked over two thousand 11-16 year olds to name the three most common activities in their classrooms. Number one across all three surveys was "copying from a board or a book", selected by an average of 60% of the sample. It is worth noting that the situation is actually deteriorating as "copying down" rose from 56% in 2000 to 61% in 2004. Two of the other most common activities were "listen to the teacher talking for a long time" and "take notes while my teacher talks". The least likely thing to happen in a classroom according to the students surveyed was "learn things that relate to the real world."

Claxton also has history on his side.

As long ago as 1856, educational reformer Joseph Payne was deplored the habit of incessant testing--of, as he put it, "continually pulling up the plants to see the condition of the roots, the consequence of which is that all good natural growth was stopped."

In many ways, the history is the saddest part. Everyone with kids pays attention to school while their kids are in school, and few realize that it's been messed-up for years. Claxton describes a project where kids were asked what their ideal school would be like:

The school I'd like would be one whose primary aim was teaching me how to live ... Today, academic knowledge has become the sole interest of many schools, and few [teachers] are daring enough to abandon the exam rat-race for the job of creating thinking, adult individuals. (Christa, sixteen).

Just as a subject has become absorbing and interesting it is locked away until the next lesson and the mind is switched to a new wavelength for the next subject. This continual interruption makes the work boring and the pupil loses interest. In tomorrow's school the work will be continued until it is finished. (Janet, sixteen).

The people who write textbooks do not make mistakes, and the best way to learn is by your own mistakes. (Jennifer, fifteen)

I don't think I would get on very well in my ideal school because I am too used to being told what to do. (Frances, fifteen)

[And finally, here is Kirsty, aged seven, bursting with good ideas despite some bad spelling]

I wold like a school that some times let you writ out work for other children in other schools ... i think as I am a child that I now how other children feel and so I can make it eseyer for them ... I think it wold be nice if we cold sugest things for ourselvs to do ... id like us to have more natur lessons out side and id prefer not to keep together as animals don't come out wen thers lots of peopel.

As Claxton observes, *the voices of these young people are entirely contemporary--yet they are drawn from entries to a competition in The Observer newspaper in 1967*. That horrified me--these were written by kids of my father's generation and things aren't substantially better today.

Claxton is skeptical of "brain-friendly learning" and the fad for mind maps, learning styles, multiple intelligence profiles, etc. As American neuroscientist David Fitzpatrick said recently, "Anything that people would say [about the brain] right now has a good chance of not being true two years from now, because the understanding is so rudimentary, and people are looking at things at such a simplistic level.".

I loved this dichotomy between British public schools (what the rest of the world calls "private schools") and comprehensives (what the rest of the world calls "public schools"):

Traditionalists rather like the idea that education is character-forming, but the *particular* qualities of character beloved of the old public and grammar schools are no longer appropriate, and need updating. Cultivating the qualities of 'leadership' and 'moral fibre' used to be the core purpose of education in the old public schools. They saw their job as producing the leaders of the future: the generals, the chairmen of boards, the cabinet ministers, the newspaper editors, the bishops. Through sports and team captaincy, the house system, debating societies, prefectship, and so on, pupils were coached in how to take responsibility, organise other people, play by the rules, own up, and the skills of collecting and collating information, marshaling clear and cogent case, and expressing their views on paper. They were continually coached not just in how to do these things, but in the value and importance of them. This tradition continued,

somewhat diluted, in the grammar schools.

In parallel, in the state schools, pupils were being taught the basics of the three Rs. But they too were having their characters moulded. At its worst, the ethos of many elementary schools invited and rewarded only displays of diligence, attentiveness, politeness, deference to authority, punctuality, and accurate recapitulation of what had been taught. These 'follower virtues' of the working man and woman were less talked about than the public school virtues, for obvious reasons. The working classes did not need to know that their education was designed to make them uncomplaining and accurate doers of others' bidding. The fact that some of them worked this out for themselves, and that a great many more of their grandchildren now show their disaffection with such a model, shows an upsurge of resistance to an anachronistic and demeaning system.

The money shot for me in the book was Claxton's description of a good learner. I think he hit every aspect on the head when he reduced it to eight qualities:

1. Powerful learners are *curious*. As we saw in the last chapter, children are born curious. They are drawn to learning. They like to engage with things that are new and puzzling--within limits. They meet the world with an attitude of "what's that?" and "that's odd...". Learners like to wonder about things; how they come to be; how they work. They are open-minded, looking for new interests and perspectives. They like to get below the surface of things, to go deeper in their understanding. They know how to ask good, pertinent, productive questions, and they *enjoy* the process of wondering and questioning. Curious people can be challenging: they may not take "yes" for an answer. They may be healthily sceptical about what they see and are told.
2. Confident learners have *courage*. They are not afraid of uncertainty and complexity. They have the confidence to say "I don't know"--which is always the precursor to "Let's find out". They are up for a challenge, willing to take a risk, to try something they are not yet sure how to do. Given the choice, they would rather learn than merely show off how good they already are. Courageous learners can stick with things that are difficult, even when they get frustrated. They are determined in their learning, and can put in hours of hard graft when needs be. They can bounce back from mistakes: they don't stay floored for long. They have what sports coaches call "mental toughness". Mistakes are for learning from, not for getting upset about. They are patient and persistent--but they can also "give up" on things, not because they are afraid of failing or looking stupid, but because they genuinely reappraise the need to know.
3. Powerful learners are good at *exploration* and *investigation*. They like finding things out. They are good at seeking and gathering information. They are enthusiastic researchers. That can mean reading and thinking and note-taking; but it can also mean attending carefully and mindfully to situations, taking time if needs be, not jumping to conclusions, letting a situation speak to them. They know how to concentrate; they can easily get lost in their inquiries. They like and are good at sifting and evaluating what they see and hear and read: they develop a trust in their abilities to tell "good evidence". Explorers are also good at finding, making and capitalising on resources that will help them pursue their projects--tools, places, source of information, other people. They are opportunistic, alive to new possibilities, and resources that crop up along the way.
4. Powerful learning requires *experimentation*. This is the virtue of the practical inventor and

the ingenious, inveterate tinkerer. They like to try things out, sometimes to see if they work, sometimes just to see what happens. They like adjusting things, tuning their skills, and looking for small improvements. They enjoy looking at their "work in progress"--a garden bed, an essay, a guitar riff--and seeing how they can redraft and revise it. They know how to do "good practice", and how to extract the most learning from their experience. They say "Let's try..." and "What if?" They like messing about with interesting material--mud, footballs, PhotoShop, friends--to uncover the potential of materials, situations and people. They know how to "prod" things, to get them to reveal themselves. They are happy to try different approaches, to mess things up, make mistakes, if they are not too costly and if they think they might be informative.

5. Powerful learners have *imagination*. They know how to use the creative test-bed of their own inner worlds to generate and explore possibilities. They know the value of running "mental simulations" of tricky situations to see how they might behave. They are also good at mental rehearsal, practising and smoothing their own performances in their mind's eye. They know when and how to make use of reverie, how to let ideas "come to them". But they have a mixture of respect and scepticism toward their own hunches, intuitions and "Feelings of rightness". They give some credence to these feelings, but also know they need testing and checking out. They like finding links and making connections inside their own minds, and they use a lot of imagery, analogy, and metaphor in their own thinking. They know when and how to put themselves in other people's shoes; to look at the world from perspectives that are not their own "natural" ones.

6. The creativity of imagination needs to be yoked to *reason* and *discipline*, the ability to think carefully, rigorously, and methodically; to analyse and evaluate as well as to take the imaginative leap. Powerful learners are good at hard thinking; they are able to construct and follow rigorous trains of thought. They ask "How come?", and are good at creating explanations that are clear enough to lead to fresh ideas or predictions. They have the ability to and the disposition to spot the holes in their own arguments, as well as other people's.

Disciplined learners can create plans and forms of structure and organisation that support their learning--they know how and when to be methodical--but they stay open to serendipity, and are perfectly willing to think again or change their plan if needs be. Disciplined thinking enables knowledge and skill to be used to guide learning, to allow the painstaking process of "crafting" things, balancing the more creative "brainwaves".

7. Powerful learners have the virtue of *sociability*. They know how to make good use of the social space of learning. They are happy collaborating, and are good at sharing ideas, suggestions, and resources. They are good members of groups of explorers; but, more than that, they can help groups of people become really effective learning and problem-solving teams. They have the knack of being able to give their views and hold their own in debate, and at the same time stay open-minded. They can give feedback and suggestions skilfully and receive them graciously. They are keen to pick up useful perspectives and strategies from others. But they are also socially discerning. Effective learners seem to know who to talk to (and who not), and when to talk (and when to keep silent) about their own learning. They are good at judiciously balancing sociability with solitariness: they are not afraid to go off by themselves when they need to think and digest.

8. Powerful learners are *reflective*. They not only think carefully about the object of their learning; they are able to step back and take stock of the process. They can say "Hold on a minute; how are we going about this? What assumptions have we been making?" They will

routinely mull over their own modus operandi and consider alternative strategies and possibilities. They somehow know when these moments of taking stock are useful, and they don't get stuck in the trap of being over-reflective: too analytical or self-critical. Good learners are self-aware, interested in contemplating their own habits, strengths and weaknesses as they go about learning, and able to think strategically about how they can become even stronger and well-rounded in their approach. They have a rich vocabulary for talking about the process of learning--for example, when and how they learn different kinds of things best--and also about themselves as developing learners. They see themselves as continually growing in their learning power and capacity. They don't get stuck in a view of themselves as "bright" or "average".

That's something for me to reread every month and see how I'm doing. It's how I'd like to be, how I'd like my kids to be, how I'd like employees and coworkers to be.

That was the high point of the book for me, though. Claxton has only a few suggestions of how to implement this (they resemble the inquiry learning that's at the heart of the NZ curriculum and now mandatory in all primary schools). But what a high point. I strongly recommend this book: it's clearly written in plain English, lays out an excellent case, and will change the way you see the schools around you.

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### **Sean Goh says**

Children's success in life depends little on whether they can read, but whether they do, and derive enjoyment from the process.

UK Least likely to happen in school - learn things that relate to the real world

In times of change the learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists -Eric Hoffer

It's what you do with the content.

Dead metaphors: School as a monastery / factory VS apprenticeship  
Teacher as a explainer/judge VS guide / model

Zumbac tailor story: Intelligence traditionally seen as the ability to contort self to fit demands.

When one sees oneself as a learner, having to struggle is not a sign of weakness.

Feeling you have to prove yourself VS feeling free to improve yourself.

Knowledge is situated (context) and for doing, it's not what's true, it's what helps.

3Rs Responsibility, Respect, Real Things  
3Cs Choice, Challenge, Collaboration

Unless there is good reason for the need to be able to explain what you are doing or learnt, background learning by osmosis is your best bet.

Powerful learners are curious, courageous, explore and investigate, experiment, imagine, reasonable , disciplined, sociable, reflective.

The learning point is more important than 'getting the work done'

Just in time VS just in case  
Boredom breeds imagination.

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### **Kieran says**

Excellent criticism of what's wrong with an education system still essentially based on the monastic one, with some good suggestions on how to get out of it; just ruined in the middle by a load of pseudo-neurosciene waffle...

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### **Ben Scobie says**

A good book about the state of British Education (and to a certain extent the global phenomenon). It tears down your assumptions and ideas with its incredibly negative introduction but does well to offer plenty of solutions and ideas for schools, parents and learners to focus on. The highlight is definitely the look at learning, how schools can better encourage learning environments and how we can raise better learners.

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### **Susan says**

It's been a while since I've read an educational book cover to cover and highlighted it till it glows...but my copy of this book is now "glowing blue"! Claxton, from the UK, is not selling a program or suggesting spending more money on any curriculum. Instead, he believes that we need to shift our approach and beliefs about learning in our schools. It is our job to help kids "learn how to learn". He believes this is best achieved by setting up the school to be "Learning Gyms" where adults and students are keenly aware of the habits of mind they need to be a "powerful learner" vs. a "successful student". He notes that adults need to model their own learning and struggle with it. Powerful learners know how to grapple with issues/ideas. They know "when to read a manual, what questions to ask, when to take a break, when to call someone else, how to persist and continue through the messiness of it."

Claxton notes that "some experiences leave a residue that opens us up, makes us more courageous and resilient, more questioning and imaginative. And some close us down (p. 113)." I dream of a school like this...one that is filled completely with teachers and learners who understand that we are ALL teachers and learners. One that sees learning as apprenticeships and "fires kids up with the deep satisfaction of discovery and exploration." When reading this book, I was reminded of one of the most interesting workshop titles I have ever seen: "Kids are question marks, let's keep it that way." If we do, we will teach them to be true learners and prepare them well for the world in which they will one day work.

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## **Sortal says**

Claxton synthesizes the ideas of some of education's leading thinkers, including Carol Dweck, Dylan Wiliam, and Jo Boaler. When those are your sources, you can't go too far wrong! Unfortunately, his treatment of research is very limited and at times, it seems like he's cherry-picking results. For me, the philosophical links to Plato were a bonus, but others might find them more of a distraction.

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