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ALL HELL HAS BROKEN LOOSE IN EDUCATION

And here's what you're
going to do about it



ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES

Article 1: Things Are Weird Right Now

Article 2: The Signs That All Hell Has Broken Loose

Article 3: The Programs and Curriculum are Fatally Flawed

Article 4: Teacher Professional Development and Training is Ridiculously Out of Touch

Article 5: The Focus on Soft Skills Will Be Our Undoing

Article 6: Here's What You're Going To Do About It

Things Are Weird Right Now

The last year as an educator has been a weird one for me.

First, I was rejected from speaking at a conference that I never applied to speak at.

Here's the rejection letter, in case you're interested:

Good Morning and Happy Holidays!

After careful consideration, unfortunately your speaker's expressed topic area is not currently aligned with the expressed needs of our membership. However, as previously stated, I will keep your information on file, should it be more of a fit for our future events. Thank you so much for your time and consideration of NAESP, you are truly appreciated.

I tell you, you haven't lived until someone has rejected you from something you didn't even ask to be a part of. It's like, "Hey, Jill Jackson...we just wanted to pre-reject you from this thing, just in case you thought you were going to be a part of it. " That says "truly appreciated" like nothing else.

Then there was a time I posted a meme on social media about how only teachers would take a rat infested couch, throw an old blanket over it and call it "the reading corner" and a woman was outraged and said that in her 28 years in education, she had never seen an educator do that. Another teacher commented, "Nope! We put way more time, effort and money into our kids."

It was a joke. I guess we don't take jokes anymore.

Just last week, my mom found my Teacher of the Year plastic trophy from 1998 and I was reminded that I won the award only because the school couldn't re-nominate the same people who had already won. And they had to nominate at least one person. And, evidently, I was the lesser of two evils of potential nominees. So guess who their esteemed Teacher of the Year was? Yep. This second year teaching lackey who still had her mom help her set up her classroom and grade papers every week.

Then, just minding my own business, I ran into three former students of mine who were working together as valets at a swanky hotel here in L.A. And, because I'm humble like this, I kind of tried to get them to say something sweet that they remembered about being in my class when they were six years old. All they could remember was that I changed my hair color a lot. I mean I can't say they were wrong, but like nothing about how I changed the course of their lives or lit their learning on fire?

Hair color and ill-gotten teaching trophies aside, I feel like I no longer understand what on earth we are actually talking about in education. It is the same feeling I had in virtually every class in high school: everyone else deeply understands what the teacher is saying and I am just over here just trying to hide the fact that I didn't have a pencil.

There was one particular moment when I was looking at session offerings in a popular conference program that I felt like I was on another planet...this is not the education that I know.

Here are examples of sessions at one conference that is designed, I am assuming, to help educators:

Coaching for Instructional Equity Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Reimagining Teacher Engagement at the Heart of Curriculum Selection and Implementation Efforts

Developing Student Ownership: Support K-2 Students in Child-Friendly Ways

Opportunities in Equitable Spaces: A Praxis for 6-12

I'm sorry...what?

Let's break these down:

Coaching for Instructional Equity Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

I will give you \$500 cold, hard cash right now if you can tell me in very simple terms what "culturally responsive pedagogy" is and what I am supposed to do about it on Monday with a group of thirty-five 8th graders staring at me to teach them something new.

Reimagining Teacher Engagement at the Heart of Curriculum Selection and Implementation Efforts

Just too many big words. And this coming from someone who loves words! Shouldn't a session help me see things more clearly and make things doable? It's a bad sign when the title alone makes me feel winded.

Developing Student Ownership: Support K-2 Students in Child-Friendly Ways

And developing ownership in child-friendly ways...as opposed to child un-friendly ways? I'm honestly curious about the difference between the two. And the last time I checked, the way that we get kids to own what they do is to get them really good at something. They want to do that thing that you taught them all the time when they feel successful. Is that what we're calling "ownership" these days?

Opportunities in Equitable Spaces: A Praxis for 6-12

This one is a landmine because the topic of equity is pretty sensitive one these days. I am not belittling the concept or saying we don't have work to do, but I will say that I have had 3+ email conversations with people who reached out to me because they didn't think I was educated enough on equity in the classrooms. In each case, I asked them this one simple question: "What does equity mean and what does it look like?" And no one ever wrote me back.

Odd, don't you think?

If I read those session descriptions, read the non-answers from the equity discussion or took a look at the snippy responses of educators who couldn't take a joke, I would say that I don't recognize us.

Where is the laughter? (And, by the way, some educators are the funniest people I have ever met.) Where is the professional development that is actually eye-opening and, yet, still implementable? Where is the real talk, the straightforward approach that it takes to actually get things done when your client is a room full of 9 year olds who still have to towel off after recess or a crop of seniors who you have to limp to the finish line?

It feels weird. The kind of feeling out-of-place where you've walked into the wrong room and you don't know what people are talking about, but you feel like you should. After all, I really don't know how to do anything else but be an educator and it feels like my experiences around education are totally different than the direction we're headed.

When I was in high school and was way more interested in my hair and Warrant (epic 80s band...worth a Google search to just look at the hair), I had a teacher named Mr. Peritore. He taught government. To say that I had little interest in government would be an overstatement. That government class seemed like a bother to this 17 year old with plans. And a 2.1 GPA...but I digress.

Through the course of the semester with Mr. Peritore, I learned stuff. Not just any stuff, but the most important processes, information and thinking about our government. How did he do it? He loved government. Like in a weird way. But he was enthusiastic, energetic, funny...and he expected a lot out of us. He called on each of us to answer his tough questions and would coach us to the correct answer in front of our classmates if we didn't have it quite right. (We didn't have our mommies on speed dial for moral support.)

He acted things out for us and made us act things out. He taught us to argue in a useful way and then staged arguments within the classroom and we scored our classmates. (Those were the days when we could actually give feedback to each other without grasping for our emotional support dogs.)

Now I realize that Mr. Peritore wasn't just having us act things out or apply our argumentative skills because it was fun and engaging (it was), but because he was teaching us.

Do you remember when teaching was mostly about "just" teaching? Do you remember when the priority was what you did in the classroom when you were standing in front of a class of kids? Remember when you had time to actually teach?

I do, but it seems to be a thing of the past.

And it's time to change things. Strike that. We HAVE to change things from the district office to the classrooms. What we're doing now not only feels off, but the data across the board show that, although kids spend hundreds of days in our classrooms, they're not mastering the basics.

And I bet you're working too hard to not have kids nail the basics...and beyond.

It's time to wake up and not drift into nothingness as a profession.

I have decided to write a series of six articles that detail and expose how all hell has broken loose in education with the goal of identifying where we have gone so wrong and what we're going to do to fix it.

I am certain that the changes that need to be made in education must start from the inside out. If our government, state boards, district and site leaders were going to get it all right and had all of the answers, we wouldn't be at this point. The power to change is right with the most important players in education: the teachers.

Let there be no mistake: Nothing (absolutely nothing) is more important than a well-skilled, enthusiastic teacher who knows his/her content. That alone is how we get real results with students. The rest is just shenanigans.

This is article 1.

Also by Jill Jackson

Get a Backbone, Principal!

Get Some Guts, Coach!

How to Teach Students to Critically Think About Text

How to Teach Students to Write Informational Text

How to Coach Teachers to Teach Almost Anything

The Simplified Lesson Planning Formula