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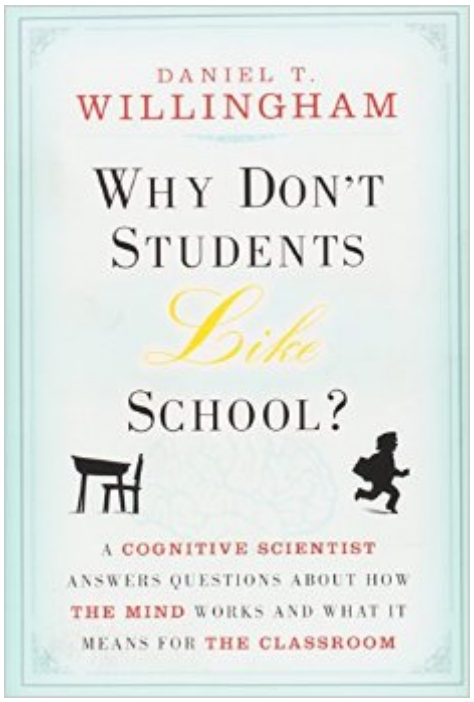
Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How The Mind Works And What It Means For The Classroom



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Synopsis

Easy-to-apply, scientifically-based approaches for engaging students in the classroom Cognitive scientist Dan Willingham focuses his acclaimed research on the biological and cognitive basis of learning. His book will help teachers improve their practice by explaining how they and their students think and learn. It reveals-the importance of story, emotion, memory, context, and routine in building knowledge and creating lasting learning experiences. Nine, easy-to-understand principles with clear applications for the classroom Includes surprising findings, such as that intelligence is malleable, and that you cannot develop "thinking skills" without facts How an understanding of the brain's workings can help teachers hone their teaching skills "Mr. Willingham's answers apply just as well outside the classroom. Corporate trainers, marketers and, not least, parents -anyone who cares about how we learn-should find his book valuable reading." â ”Wall Street Journal

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Customer Reviews

If you are a teacher, like myself, you have doubtless been inundated by advice about teaching to multiple intelligences, active (rather than passive) learning, teaching students to think rather than memorize facts, etc. If so, then you can't afford to pass up this book, which will provide a very helpful guide as to why some of these well-intentioned ideas are wrong, and what it means for you as a teacher.Dan Willingham's Why Don't Students Like School? is a book applying findings of cognitive psychology to the world of education. Sound a lot like Eric Jensen and his wildly popular

book Teaching With the Brain in Mind? Well, unlike Jensen - who educators hear a lot about - Willingham is a PhD in cognitive psychology (while Jensen, who has a bachelors in English, is "working towards" a PhD from an online university, while making his real living as a motivational speaker). Long and short: Willingham is the real deal and I move to suggest that this book infinitely deserves more popularity amongst educators than anything Jensen has written.Willingham's basic theme is that, despite everything you've heard, nothing works to increase student ability like factual learning and practice. In fact, one of his first ideas is to point out that what seperates the excellent student (or adult) from those performing less well is their ability to recall facts. The more facts you know about your subject, the more you can understand your subject because of significantly less energy spent on fact recall or retention. With facts learned to automaticity, more time can be spent on higher-order concept learning, and once that becomes automatic....etc.

Factual knowledge must precede skill. Rote learning and memorization are valuable teaching strategies. Teaching to "multiple intelligences," "learning styles," and individual student interests is a waste of time. Is this really a cognitive psychologist talking?The answer is yes, and Dr. Willingham should be knighted for flouting some of the most persistent lies about what constitutes "best practice" in the classroom these days. I just attended the ASCD's national conference in Florida last week, and while there was much blathering about brain research, teaching to the "whole child," and professional learning communities (the latest cult movement among education bureaucrats), there was precious little discussion about substantive teaching. In just 165 pages, Dr. Willingham presents more useful information than I've managed to glean in ten years of teacher-training, and he does so in a user-friendly, non-dogmatic style that can be read in one sitting.Most useful are the nine organizing principles, which are both memorable and quotable (like any smart rhetorician, Willingham begins with his most startling fact: the brain is designed not to help us think, but rather to help us avoid thinking), the quick lists of classroom implications at the conclusion of each chapter, and the bibliographical citations categorized by "less technical" and "more technical." Rather than using cognitive research to justify some hotly promoted fad or gimmick, Dr. Willingham presents the most consistent research findings, all of which tend to confirm things that the best and most experienced teachers already know to be true--e.g. the effectiveness of using narratives to dramatize and illustrate important concepts, a "best practice" that's been around since at least the time of Christ.

Every once in a while, an empirical study comes along that provides solid evidence against one of

those Constructivist practices that some of us whose thoughts on education come more from actual practice than from education theory have often been skeptical about. There is, for example, Jennifer Kaminski's Ohio State study, which suggests that too much of a focus on "real-world" math obscures the underlying mathematics, such that students are unable to transfer concepts to new problems.Dan Willingham's book Why Don't Students Like School presents a whole bunch of these experimental results. Together, they challenge the notions that:1. Students need to learn inquiry, argumentation, and higher-level thinking *rather than* tons of facts.2. Integrating art into other subjects enhances learning; so does integrating computer technology.3. Children learn best through self-guided discovery.4. Drill is kill. Multiple strategies in a given lesson are better than a single strategy practiced multiple times.5. Students learn best when constructing their own knowledge.6. The best way to prepare students to become scientists and mathematicians is to teach them to solve problems the way scientists and mathematicians do.The empirical data that Willingham cites show that, in fact:1. Factual knowledge, lots of it, is a prerequisite to higher-level thinking.2. Students are most likely to remember those aspects of a lesson that they end up thinking about the most. Corollary: Incorporating art or computer technology into another subject may sometimes cause students to think about the art or the technology more than the lesson content, such that they don't retain the latter.3.

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