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10 Reasons Students Should Go on Strike

By [Peter DeWitt](#) on September 20, 2015 7:10 AM

Today's guest blog is co-written with Russell Quaglia, President and Founder of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA).

There is a lot going around social media about [teachers in Seattle who are striking](#) because of unfair evaluation practices...among other issues. These strikes taking place are around serious issues....issues that educators have been being vocal about for years. What's happening, specifically in Seattle, is very raw and for most educators the thought of striking is uncomfortable at best. It has us thinking about our students.

What if students could strike?

Over the years students have become much more passive. They sit at desks, and in many cases, are expected to listen and do what they are told without question. In some classrooms it is commonplace to question the learning taking place in classroom. In others, question may not be allowed at all.

Students continue to have information shoved at them, and are sometimes ignored when they want something different. Sure, there are times when that can be blamed on accountability and mandates, which teachers cannot always control. Those rules have been the epitome of compliance. Other times, however, it is merely due to the way education has always been.

When we think of teacher evaluation being attached to point scales, we should not forget that students have their entire educational success based on evaluations tied to point scales and tests which are no more than a moment in time, and don't accurately measure what a student will do in the future. We all suffered from the same issue. The insanity of unfair evaluation practices and lack of voice has been happening to students a lot longer than to teachers...*and yet no strike from students?*

Now, teachers are being evaluated the same way as students and their voices are being thwarted and it doesn't feel good. Perhaps it makes teachers think back to when they were sitting behind the desk as a student instead of standing in front of all of them as a teacher?

There are so many educators who want something more for their students. They work hard. They are innovative and help foster classrooms that focus on social-emotional, as well as, academic learning. Those teachers and school leaders have their students engaged in collaborative learning opportunities. They are involving students in real decision making efforts. They are expecting students to be productive members of the educational community. These progressive educators are operating in an educational system built on trust and responsibility and not one of accountability and fear.

Those educators and leaders want their students to stand up, speak out, and be heard. They want and expect more from the entire student body.

The whole concept of voice in schools centers around, not always believing you need to get what you want, but at least having a place at the table and being responsible for what you say. Too many students are taught about compliance and not enough about using their voice in meaningful and productive ways. We need to find a balance between teaching students how to be successful in school, without losing their independence and feeling compliant in order to survive in our educational system.

There are at least 10 reasons students should strike. They are:

1. Test Prep - Months before high stakes testing happens, students have to do test prep after test prep. That is mind numbingly boring! And it does nothing to prepare them for the future.

2. Testing - For at least one hour a day over a period of weeks, students have to take ELA, math and science state exams, which never really give them any feedback on learning. They are slapped with a score that is never really explained to them, which is more of a state issue than a school issue. Tests are used to sort students into groups that are supposed to provide them with help that they may or may not need because that grouping is based on one moment in time from how they did on a test. The [Seattle teachers boycotted](#) this last year.

3. Their perspective - What do students want to learn about? What do they have on their minds? Their perspective is used as an excuse for why we ignore student surveys. We simply say we don't have to listen to the surveys because they are the students' perspective. That's

exactly why we should listen! It doesn't mean we can always meet their desire, but at least let them understand why.

4. Sit & Get - We would strike if we had to enter a classroom every morning, or multiple classrooms each day, and wait to find out what we will learn and then be taught the exact same way every day. It's why adults hate most professional development but we do it to our students.

5. Lack of connection between what they are learning and their everyday lives - Why are we learning this? This question has been probably happening for centuries! Why can't they experience cool learning like Pixar in a Box or other creative ideas that would maximize learning.

6. No one knows students hopes and dreams. If we are to ever connect with students we need to know something about them. According to Quaglia and Corso's research, only 34% of students believe teachers know what they want for their future.

7. Lack of personal care. 45% of students don't think teachers care about them as an individual (Quaglia & Corso). We do things for people that believe in us, that we care about, that have high expectations for us. How can we expect students to give 100% effort when half the students don't think we even care about them?

8. No one listens. Students have something to say and all students have something to teach us, yet only 52% of students believe teachers are willing to learn from them.

9. They have no voice in decision-making - We don't involve students in decision making. We just tell them after a decision has been made and expect them to follow without question! Do you know that when students have a voice they are 7 times more likely to be academically motivated to learn (Quaglia & Corso)?

We think the biggest reason they should strike is **#10**

10. Because they can! - There are more of them than us! During the 60's and 70's we saw student protests in higher education and many changed not only what was happening in colleges and universities but had a profound impact on society in general, from civil rights to the Vietnam war.

The voices of students were heard because they stood up for something that was greater than themselves. Those students had a sense of purpose. Those students had a conviction and passion for something better. Those students made a difference. Those students didn't always worry about being compliant, because they knew there was more to life than that.

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