

Sermonette, Education, Deborah Bond-Upson

Albert Einstein said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” (see the quote is on the slide)

We have a big problem, an education crisis.

Society is struggling with it.

And Unitarian Universalists are ideally suited to lead the remedy.

The images on the screen show you some of the wonderful things going on with youth in our church.

In 4.5 minutes, I will tell you the Top Ten Reasons I believe UU’s can solve the U.S. education crisis. But first, let’s look at how we got into this mess.

Kids don’t seem to like learning in the 1800’s classroom model and their achievement has suffered. Most don’t like sitting at those cramped desks, working by themselves, taking tests, and having to listen to things they already know or are not yet ready to learn. Now the U.S. is 28th in HS graduation rate, 25th in math and 17th in science. A big drop from a few years ago.

To remedy this trend, a few years back, some brilliant thinkers decided that we would test all students to see what they were learning and punish schools and teachers if the kids did not learn enough.

So if the kids didn’t like school so far, we would give them more tests, take away their favorite subjects, and humiliate their teachers. That should fix it.

As you’ve probably heard, this has not worked out so well. Some of the best teachers left the profession out of frustration with having to “teach to the test”. Kids who were capable of higher-level work lost interest in lessons. Kids who did not do well in school got sick from the pressure, stayed home, or failed. School years and school days that were too short now were filled with more prepping for the tests and more actual testing. Art, sports, and even science were given less time – or no time.

Students who were energized by art or music or sports or science, disengaged more. Meanwhile many of these students started using computers at school or at home. They found they could learn things and get answers without being held back or humiliated in class.

By now it is clear that schools will not meet the No Child Left Behind goals next. Graduation rates hover at around 50% in urban areas, dropouts are 8 times as likely to go to prison, will suffer unemployment at greater rates, and will earn 40% of what college grads earn.

So what are we going to do?

Blame teachers. Blame unions. Try a few experiments.

Some public schools like Mike Staffaroni’s project-based learning HS, some private schools and some charter schools are thriving. But 4 in 5 charter schools are not doing well and charter schools can’t accommodate our students on a broad basis, even if they grew at rates vastly higher, they could only serve 25% of our student in 10 years. What about the youths who won’t be served?

Emerson said “The child amidst his baubles, is learning the action of light, motion, gravity, muscular force.” How can we protect that fresh effective learning, support them and get barriers out of their way?

Project Zero at Harvard Graduate School of Education found 98% of 3-5 year olds rank “genius” in multiple intelligences including divergent thinking, this drops to 32% at 8-10 years, 10% at 13-15 years, and to 2% at 25 years and older. We must learn how to protect their genius.

Without solving our education crisis, we cannot solve our other crises.

What are we at First Unitarian Church of Honolulu doing to address this? **Plenty.**

For example, Joann Marshall of our congregation, joined with others forming SOS—“Save our Schools” to lobby, educate, and sit in.

Legislation was passed to guarantee 180 days of school—

And it withstood budget cuts only via continued work by SOS, FACE, Parents for Public Schools and other active citizens.

Nan, Catherine, Steve, Susan and others continue service on the FACE Education Task Force.

We hosted FACE Education Talk Story here. Jim Lomont lead the Board of Education Forum in this room.

Mike Staffaroni teaches in an effective project-based learning HS.

Lisa Gilles-Davis guides youths toward college with Upward Bound,

Veronica Morgan and our own president Charlotte Huszcza support students in our public schools.

Helen Slaughter, career educator, is engaged in education reform.

Our Gallery on the Pali mounted student and teacher exhibits pointing to the exemplar and rare arts program at Kalihi Middle School.

We serve on school community councils, tutoring groups, in our own Sunday school, Coming of Age, and OWL programs, attend legislative meetings, talk to our friends and neighbors about the importance of education reform. I am proud of all this congregation does to support public education.

The slides showing the deep attention and love this church devotes to our young people will continue during the education musical interlude. Please note your Education actions—completed or planned and hand them to our youths.

Now, the Top Ten Reasons Why I think UU’s can beat the crisis in education:

- 1) we are smart and we care about education more than anyone
- 2) we like to find new ways to think
- 3) we like change
- 4) we enjoy listening to our children
- 5) we treasure our children’s thoughts and products
- 6) we consider all the children our children
- 7) we know that everyone needs to learn continuously, not just children
- 8) we know that imagination is more important than memorization
- 9) we are not afraid of having our children exceed us
- 10) we don’t give up