Put the Productivity Myth in the Bin

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I'm tired of being told to be more productive when we should be building better and more supportive networks and collectives that support our creative outlets (among other needs). It's excruciating how much some people want to just atomise all work onto the individual, to make one person responsible for every single skill they need to just *show* their creations to the world. So many of the same people promoting ideas of unionising and working towards a healthier society *continue to promote workerism*, which just ignores the needs of so many.

Yes, there *is* a lot of work that we all need to do so that we can get to that healthier society, but we can't keep atomising it to individual people simply because that's what some of us have been taught. We can't keep expecting individuals to carry the load of groups *all the time*. The whole point of *building a community* is to share the responsibility amongst each other and to make it possible for everyone to *do what they can* while getting the support that they need.

This atomisation needs to stop.

It's just going to slaughter our creativity and ruin any desire to do the work necessary to build our communities toward those that support *everyone*. We're just going to burn out entirely if we buy into the myth of productivity.

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It's not that I don't understand where this belief comes from. For what feels like forever (but is probably more aptly hundreds of years), we've been surrounded in a constant push for economic productivity. For some, this productivity and drive for profits was mandated through forced slavery that often included ripping people from their homes and cultures while enduring abuse and torture. For others, it has been implemented through work that's been incentivised by absurdly low wages that pushes them to work as much as possible just to survive.

Today, we're surrounded by other forms of it. Far too many social media accounts try to sell expensive courses on "how to be more productive." Supposed 'motivational' speakers and influencers lament that we're "wasting our free time" when we could be working and "getting ourselves out of debt," even while charging exorbitant fees to say nothing concrete all while they provide precisely zero help.

Content creators even get in on the 'productivity' game, making statements about how they "don't understand" why people can't produce work on a consistent schedule when *that person* was able to work multiple jobs for 70 hours a week *and* produce bi-weekly content.

As if we should all want to be like *that*.

It's exhausting to have people act like we're all "using our free time wrong," as every waking hour of our lives should be spent working and grinding ourselves into an early death for the sake of… something. Money? Content? Art? Freedom? I don't know. It's always pretty vague.

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This stuff starts super early. Kids receive this messaging in schools all the time, so I have to believe that they're *adding* to and *enhancing* the productivity myth. Certainly, it must have started earlier because children *did* work in factories and were subjected to a lot of the same things adults were (and even by their own families who often sent them to work as soon as they could in order to survive).

But once kids were mandated to go to school, this myth persisted due to the structures they were placed in. If someone were to survey teachers about 'productivity' in schools, we'd all have a range of responses that highlight how we pester our students to "stop being lazy" or for being "unmotivated." More than once, I've heard teachers complain about kids "wasting time" and "not being productive enough in class." Others have lamented the "lost hour" because their students were "too distracted" by something else.

It's probably the *most* common category of complaint I've ever heard while working in schools, and it's definitely the most frequent thing I've *read* while helping my colleagues when they ask me to proofread their reports. I've even been guilty of making that same comment in the early stages of my career (and still sometimes have to stop and reflect when I catch myself writing something about being productive). It's pervasive.

Many parents aren't guiltless here, either. When I stopped giving unnecessary homework (and making "necessary" homework optional), I initially had parents writing to me in *droves* to accuse me that their kids "weren't doing enough" to actually learn at school. The expectation that a child should be *constantly* busy perpetuates this 'productivity' myth in among our own students.

It's like we haven't realised they need *time* for themselves, just as we all do.

Even an article written by Sarah Jaffe in *Rethinking Schools* highlights this exact mentality in an interview with a teacher:

"When I was meeting with students right after break this week, a lot of students were telling me that they were upset that they're not as productive as they usually are," [Peta] Lindsay said. "We had to pull back and talk about 'What is this drive for productivity?'"

That's a good question: What *is* this drive for productivity?

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When they're very young, children enter an institution that, on the surface, *claims* it's meant for "learning" and "education." They are told that they must, almost entirely on their own, memorise and regurgitate the same sets of facts to our satisfaction in order to receive grades that are often arbitrary and entirely dependent upon the teacher handing them out. They are required to all learn the same sets of skills to the "proper" level, and we expect that they do most of this without asking questions because that won't be allowed to happen when they take a test.

If they work together (unless given permission because the project allows it), it's deemed cheating and is unacceptable. We implement structures that pits people against each other from a very young age instead of building a supportive learning community.

None of that says *learning*. It doesn't even say *community*, yet we enjoy calling it a "school community" when we're busy forcing individual students to be responsible for the workload of the many on their own (and requiring that workload to be exceptionally redundant).

I hate this. I find it grotesque, infuriating, and isolating. It perpetuates some nonsensical belief that *everyone* has to know *everything*. And if you don't know everything, you get penalised for not knowing it instead of being given time to just look into things, being given another chance to try something, or having space to ask for help or accommodations.

Part of it seeks to create a constant competition between people, which persists throughout other areas of life: university ac-

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I guess they went to the same hellish place that schools sent 'creativity' and 'ingenuity' to, which is why the IB (like others) decided to rely on algorithms during the COVID-19 pandemic instead of working with *thousands* of teachers who likely would've been happy to help figure out a *better* way to do things for the future.

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It's exhausting to constantly have to support this productivity narrative in some of the most banal ways. There are so many better options for everyone that allow people to grow and learn at their own rate.

These so-called "standards" that we use to measure education are completely meaningless and entirely arbitrary. A number of educators, including Zoe Bee and Flora's Place, have been discussing how grades actually *harm* our learning process and make us less motivated.

But the same applies to our constant push to be "productive" and do more than we possibly can as isolated individuals. It's caused people to burn out. It's made people feel unworthy and incapable just because they can't do *everything* that is asked of them.

It just needs to stop.

ceptance, career paths, accomplishments, bank accounts, and resources.

It's divisive, which is the *point*.

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Perhaps it's time to realise that these *exact same* mechanisms hurt teachers in this so-called "school community," too.

The separation of subjects does more harm than good, forcing *one person* to be able to recall all of the knowledge they possibly can in a specific subject area in order to regurgitate it to their students at varying grade levels and difficulties (who then need to regurgitate it *back* to them in order to move on to the next level or graduate). It creates a structure that insists you need a specific person who teaches skills that are deemed "history" and another who teaches those deemed "science." It's a weird fiction that pretends all of the subject areas are unrelated and unable to co-exist in the same spaces, despite the fact that all of the subjects *need* each other.

And it just creates more work for everyone.

It's definitely more work for the students (who have to do this for at least eight subjects every school year) and more work for the teachers (who have to figure out what is "appropriate" for the grade level and not accidentally teach "too much" for fear it impacts someone else's plans). It pushes us to be *more productive*, defined by the amount of content we get through and assignments we hand out. If we don't do that, we're given messages that tell us to see ourselves as lazy (or see others as lazy) if they forget to plan *one* thing or forget to do even *one* assignment.

We see people as *uninvolved* in the "school community" if they don't participate in extracurricular activities, which take place *outside* of class time and often without any additional compensation. Teachers often get looked down upon by directors and other teaching staff for not running *additional* clubs. We start viewing students as being *without initiative* if they don't join these clubs, decreasing

their chances of getting positive feedback should they need it for any future references.

Why? What is the purpose? And more productive *on what*?

What is it that we're *actually* doing?

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Even more infuriating is when schools use curriculum that supposedly promotes collaborative work, they still insist upon placing all the responsibility on the individual for their learning rather than enabling a genuine community effort. The International Baccalaureate (IB) is notorious for this, despite claiming that they're "different" and "can do more than other curricula." Unfortunately for them, they *also* have a number of consultants working with schools who explain that the IB curriculum is made to be placed on top of a national curriculum, should a school need it.

In truth, it's not *that* different from those it claims to be "better" than.

One of the more frustrating elements of the IB is that it allows schools to build *ten* years of a collaborative and interdisciplinary program between the Primary Years Program (PYP) and the Middle Years Program (MYP) only to cap them off with the final *two years* forcing people to choose between a 'non-academic' program in the Career-related Program (CP) or an 'academic' program in the Diploma Program (DP). That is, if the school decides to become accredited for both, which appears to be incredibly rare with the overwhelming majority of schools opting for the DP.

It's strange, though, that the IB continues pushing the assumption that "some kids are academic" and "some kids just aren't." It's beyond absurd and genuinely a remnant of our history of eugenics in schools, as it's closely related to 'academic tracking'.

Students who take the "academic" path of the DP after having spent ten years in the PYP and MYP are led into an entirely different type of program for two years that focuses on *individual* skills and *individual* knowledge. It places *more* barriers between subjects and only allows them to explore their intersections in seemingly random and disjointed spaces that continue to encourage *individual* talent as opposed to collaboration. Everything in the DP feels individualised for no apparent reason: multiple essays, multiple exams of absurd length and highly specific structures, and individual presentations.

For a program that claims it was *communicative* and *caring* learners who are part of a "school community," they sure know how to build a program that runs counter to that.

At the end of the program, students are required to sit through individual exams that are then sent off to "IB test examiners" instead of being marked by their teachers. Similarly, extended essays that they've spent *months* writing are marked by complete strangers who know little of their skills and abilities. These roles are completely unnecessary and, honestly, both remove the autonomy of the teacher, community, and student and can entirely harm the relationship between everyone involved (except the nameless, faceless examiner who almost never has to actually engage with anyone).

The feedback that students receive is minimal (if they even manage to get anything beyond numerical scores), and it's even more meaningless because they can't directly question it should there be concerns or issues. Sometimes their teachers' marks and feedback are taken into consideration, but the examiner *doesn't have to*. It's entirely up to them, and that can sometimes cause major issues.

It's even difficult to *fight back* against such problems. It's intentionally designed to be time consuming so that most people don't even dare to try. Why should we *fight back* and *waste our time* when we have *so much other work to do*?

And I mean, how else are you supposed to *assess* the learning progress of students if they're not being made to do everything *individually* and on some kind of standardised exam that might be built on skills they struggle with? What happened to the *collaboration* that was seen as important only a couple years prior?

Where did the *community* go in the learning process?