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The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly About Street Smarts

\* Gerald Graff’s essay, “Hidden Intellectualism,” argues that schools and colleges should not overlook a student who is more street smart rather than book smart and try to apply lessons adjacent to the student’s strong points. Graff offers a few examples of himself being the anti-intellectual teenager but also coming to the realization that he was not the typical working class hood. Graff observes the fact that he had slight interest in his schoolwork, unless it was pertaining to sports. His essay concludes by stating that making student’s nonacademic interests an object of academic study is useful for getting student’s attention and overcoming their boredom and alienation. Although I stand in agreement with Gerald Graff that schools overlook students who tend to be more street smart than academically heightened, I also believe that students who are challenged with school must apply themselves to make schools show interest in them.

In agreement with Gerald Graff, we both know it is true that, “ schools miss out on the opportunity to tap into a student’s strong suit of street smarts and channel them into quality academic work.” For example, Graff discusses how he practiced being intellectual by him analyzing sports and movies. We do these things all the time without even knowing that we are prepping ourselves academically. I never knew how much those arguments about who the best player in professional basketball was actually enhancing my intellect. Furthermore, as Graff points out, “sports are only one of the domains whose potential for literacy training,” are taken lightly by schools and colleges. Schools should try to present students with subjects that are more relatable and appealing to them at first rather than what the schools are interested in giving them. Students get bored when subjects aren’t relatable and often let their mind wonder on any and everything except what is actually taking place in class. Not that I am proud of it or anything, but I find myself drifting away in a few of my classes because the subjects that are being taught, are flat out boring or are just presented in a dull fashion. Who wants to discuss or write about the French Revolution or Shakespeare compared to writing or discussing the new Transformers movie or who has the best chance to win next year’s Superbowl. Graff mentions how “street smarts beat out book smarts in our culture.” He states, “street smarts satisfy our intellectual thirst over school culture because it seems unreal.” Just like the opening paragraph of Graff’s essay asserts: “schools and colleges might be at fault for missing the opportunity to tap into street smarts and channel them into good academic work.”

In contrast with Graff about schools not paying students enough attention when they are labeled street smart, I believe that students who are more academically challenged but are not socially challenged should apply themselves in school more to attract the interest of colleges. Graff begins his essay stating, “Everyone knows some young person who is impressively street smart but does poorly in school.” I can honestly say that I use to be that guy and not to talk bad about some of my friends and associates but more than 80% of them are living life as what we refer to as street smart. Colleges are attracted to students with a higher grade point average but despite the fact that a student may have problems academically, they still must put in the work to gain interest from schools. Students could schedule tutoring sessions to help them with their struggles. I, myself, have taken after school tutoring sessions while I was in high school. Even here at Horry Georgetown Technical College, students have been presented with the opportunity to take tutoring sessions to help them with school projects. Some teachers even assign students the task of getting a tutoring session to assist them with a certain project just like my English 101 teacher, Professor Alicia Bolton. Students could also work on extra credit assignments to boost their grades. Despite the fact that Graff believes a person with street smarts don’t receive the attention they deserve to help them advance as much as they could intellectually, he also makes it known that using nonacademic interest to lure students attention can only get them so far academically. That statement is more than true. So many students depend on their teachers to cater to their every need. In some cases, that is helpful but in the long run, the student is going to have to buckle down and work hard just like everyone else. It has been proven that everyone learns differently. Some students pickup things quicker than others and some students take a little longer to pick-up things but they gradually get the point. On many occasions, I felt like certain topics in school were boring to me and that I had no real interest. I also realized that we as a people, get in our own way sometimes. I don’t know how many times that I mentally clocked out at school because my mind was on a girl or on some new shoes or what I was planning to do after that class or after school. With that being said, we can’t always blame the teacher for the way we interpret things. Perhaps Mr. Graff will read my essay one day and see the point I’m making about students who are more street smart, needing to put their foot down and working hard so that they can gain acknowledgement of different schools and colleges.

Furthermore, Graff seems to be confused as he made reference to his childhood about how he pretended he was street smart around certain people to avoid humility and the possibility of getting beat up but deep down he knew he was very intellectual. Don’t get me wrong, we have all done this at some point in time in life. We dumb it down in front of a select group of peers so that we don’t portray ourselves an outcast. Graff began to contemplate those feelings as he was in college and realized that he was practicing the art of being intellectual his whole entire life. Times have changed since the 1940s and 1950s during Graff’s school days, then again, who am I kidding?

In conclusion, Gerald Graff is correct with his essay’s argument about students deemed as street smart having a lack of interest which causes conflict with them academically and ultimately resulting with schools showing little or no interest. However, Graff contradicts himself when he states that students are going to need more than nonacademic interest to help them succeed academically. In so many words, he says students need to achieve higher learning regardless of how much teachers make the lessons more appealing. Teachers have found better ways to appeal to street smart students and book smart students but if you really take the time to think about it, the teachers are just using those methods to teach the same boring lessons that they initially had planned.

Works Cited

Graff, Gerald. “Hidden Intellectualism.” *They Say I Say The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing.* Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein. New York. W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. 198-205. Print.