

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Education has evolved throughout history, but in today's society public education has become outdated. Radical education reform is needed, and school systems in America need to transform in order to prepare today's youth for the future. The relationship between society/ culture and education is key to running a progressive nation. When America became an independent nation, education was created to fuel a democratic country and schools were created to groom educated voters.¹ The creation of common schools was a way the government could instill American values into children, while at the same time utilize public education as a strategy to fight poverty.² When public schools were first founded in the 1820s to 1840s there were many goals to create this "good" society including these major political goals stated in Joel Spring's *American Education*:

1. Teaching a common set of political beliefs
2. Learning to obey the law by obeying school rules
3. Providing an equal opportunity for all to be elected to political positions
4. Emphasizing voting as the key to political and social change
5. Learning about the workings of government
6. Educating patriotic citizens
7. Educating students to be involved in community activities³

Some of these goals still hold great importance in today's society. The first and second goals are still relevant; society still trains the youth at a young age to follow the rules. In order for a school community to run smoothly each individual must respectfully follow the rules and fulfill their particular role in that microcosm. Horace Mann, also

¹ Joel Spring, *American Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2014), 9.

² Ibid.

³ Joel Spring, *American Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2014), 10.

referred to as the father of American schools, believed that public education could control crime rate. He believed in the early years of education that if you taught students moral instruction in schools that crime would be reduced. Mann stated, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”⁴ Mann believed that different student bodies from various economic and social backgrounds should be integrated into the classroom to create equality through knowledge.

Although, the once optimistic goal of “providing an equal opportunity for all to be elected to political positions” has been outdated and overlooked. Functionalism is a theory that states school is a great equalizer and it levels the playing field for every student providing “equal educational opportunities for children, regardless of gender, social class, race, language, or religion.”⁵ Functionalism was intended to equally prepare everyone for the workforce. This theory was based on a system that is fair and just, in which everyone is allotted equal opportunity for success. On the contrary, conflict theory opposes functionalist ideals. Conflict theorists do not believe that school is this equalizing force, but rather a way to preserve and continue the class system in our society to ensure all roles of society are filled.⁶ To promote the success of the economic state in the United States Samuel Bowles states:

1. That schools have evolved in the United States not as part of a pursuit of equality but rather to meet the needs of capitalist employers for a disciplined and skilled labor force, and to provide a mechanism for school control in the interests of political stability.

⁴ Joel Spring, *American Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2014), 31

⁵ Joan H. Strouse, *Exploring Socio-Cultural Themes in Education: Readings in Social Foundations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001), 118.

⁶Ibid.

2. That as the economic importance of skilled and well-educated labor has grown, inequalities in the school system have become increasingly important in reproducing the class structure from one generation to the next
3. That the U.S. school system is pervaded by class inequalities, which have shown little sign of diminishing over the last half century
4. That the evidently unequal control over school boards and other decision – making bodies in education does not provide sufficient explanation of the persistence and pervasiveness of inequalities in the school system⁷

So instead of America, providing equal education to all, schools are grooming students into specific tracks and/ or roles in order to cater to societal needs and social classes instead of allowing everyone an equal chance to run this country. So, now the question arises, which students are pushed into which professions, and why?

In addition to Horace Mann believing that education can control crime he also believed that education would provide economic growth by utilizing human capital theory, the more you invest in people the more return you will get on them.⁸ Human capital economics drives education today; America wants the most ‘bang for their buck’. Society wants to invest in consequentialism, making decisions for the greatest good for the greatest numbers, versus non-consequentialism, focusing on individual needs. Therefore, if one invests in a rich neighborhoods with supportive families, the more likely those students will have a larger return for their investment, versus investing in low socioeconomic area where the investment might not be worth it. Unfortunately, it is

⁷ Joan H. Strouse, *Exploring Socio-Cultural Themes in Education: Readings in Social Foundations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001), 120.

⁸ Joel Spring, *American Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2014), 82.

economically logically to invest in richer areas, instead of each child regardless of their social class.

The next three major political goals are also outdated:

4. Emphasizing voting as the key to political and social change
5. Learning about the workings of government
6. Educating patriotic citizens⁹

According to the Washington Post Article *Where are all the young voter?* Catherine Rampell states, “only a third of young people say their vote will ‘make a difference’.”¹⁰ In 2014, the lowest amount of youth voted, 19.9 percent of 18-to 29-year-old voters cast a ballot in last falls election.¹¹ A small minority of youth vote, and schools do not encourage voting as the way to create change. Additionally, without voting interest, the youth has lost faith and trust in government and authority. America’s youth today are uninterested and uninformed about government. These three goals have become outdated and have been replaced with goals of standardization, by enforcing standardized testing, grading, and curricula.

The last major political goal of influencing students to be involved in community activity has still played a major role in education today. Students are encouraged to create a social community with one another. John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator born in Burlington, Vermont, was an advocate of participatory democracy.¹²

Dewey wanted education to be social, so ideas can bounce off one another and create a

⁹ Joel Spring, *American Education* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2014), 10.

¹⁰ Catherine, Rampell, “Where are all the young voters?,” *The Washington Post*, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/where-are-the-young-voters/2015/07/23/2781990e-316f-11e5-8f36-18d1d501920d_story.html.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gerald L. Gutek, *Historical And Philosophical Foundations of Education*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001), 308.

social school community. He believed that, “ human intelligence is socially acquired as people interact with each other in solving problems in their environment.”¹³

I believe that the primary purpose of education today should not be a political plan to create voters and a strong democracy, or an economic plan to create smart investments and a richer nation, but should be a system that supports human beings. School should be a place of invaluable lessons of resiliency, self-exploration, and intellectual curiosity. School needs to be an institution of questioning shared with others through positive communication, like John Dewey stated. It should not be a chain of rules and commands, in which if a student strays from the orderly day they are pegged as a problem. School should be challenging and difficult, it should push ones imagination and problem-solving skills beyond reason. Sir Ken Robinson in his TED Talk *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, states that intelligence comes in different forms and learning should cater to that. He goes on to explain:

We know three things about intelligence. One, it’s diverse. We think about the world in all the ways that we experience it. We think visually, we think in sound, we think kinesthetically. We think in abstract terms, we think in movement. Second, intelligence is dynamic. If you look at the interactions of a human brain, as we heard yesterday from a number of presentations, intelligence is wonderfully interactive. The brain isn’t divided into compartments. In fact, creativity—which I define as the process of having original ideas that have value—more often than

¹³ Gerald L. Gutek, *Historical And Philosophical Foundations of Education*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2001), 315.

not comes about through the interaction of different disciplinary ways of seeing things.¹⁴

Learning should be an entirely integrated process, everything affects everything and different ways to approach subjects can promote intelligence.

I believe school curricula should teach information and skills through an artistic lens. Art, the universal language, has the ability to bridge all cultures. Since the beginnings of time, people have had a natural desire to create. Through the ups and downs of humanity, art has endured as a constant. It is human nature to play, explore, express, and create. Instilling students with the confidence to express themselves through art, or any other means, will serve to facilitate the larger objective of building a supportive community. Sara Shandler, author of *Ophelia Speaks*, highlights coming of age battles in adolescence. *Ophelia Speaks* is a compilation of individual stories written by adolescent females as a response to social norms in secondary education.¹⁵ Similar stories come one after the next in Pollack and Shuster's *Real Boys' Voices*. *Real Boys' Voices* acts as the counterpart of *Ophelia Speaks*, where several specific individual entries focus on coming of age battles amongst adolescent boys.¹⁶ Many students identify with the stories written and it is an important to create a space in the classroom where students can feel comfortable with their struggles and maybe even feel less alone.

As an educator I need to summon my inner self, look pass the fact that I am a privileged middle class white woman blessed at every turn, to become relatable and reliable source of inspiration for every student, regardless of upbringing. I need to

¹⁴ Ken Robinson, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, TED Talk Video, 00:19:24, Feb 2006, https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

¹⁵ Sara Shandler, *Ophelia Speaks* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

¹⁶ William S. Pollack and Todd Shuster, *Real Boys' Voices* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

always remember that every person, despite age, culture, and social class, are all creatures that yearn to be loved and supported. Rita Pierson's TED Talk, *Every Kids Needs a Champion*, serves as a great inspiration when she tells her students to say, "I am somebody. I was somebody when I came. I'll be a better somebody when I leave. I am powerful, and I am strong. I deserve the education that I get here. I have things to do, people to impress, and places to go."¹⁷ I want to let my students in on the power of positive thinking and the virtues of perseverance.

I believe in major school reform. Students need more freedom to make decisions and then be held accountable for those decisions. Schools should teach what is needed in that specific environment. If students need to learn survival skills, creative ways to maneuver life, and problem solving that is what schools should teach. Reading about the students in the South Bronx in Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, made me truly realize what some students have to endure everyday to receive an inadequate education.¹⁸ This particular student body needs to focus on real-world skills. I want to use art as a way to transform underfunded education. Art can be free, completely recycled, and still teach priceless lessons. It is an educator's responsibility to inspire and empower students, regardless of resources offered. In order to satisfy this responsibility the environment created in the classroom must spur a sense of safety and comfort regardless of the physical setting. Even if plaster is falling on my student's head, like it did in the schools

¹⁷Rita Pierson, *Every Kid Needs a Champion*, TED Talk Video, 00:07:48, May 2013, https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion?language=en.

¹⁸ Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 83-119.

Kozol discusses, I still have the responsibility to create a welcoming environment worth attending.¹⁹

Life is about going the extra mile to dig deeper and truly understand the familiar and unknown. Each school needs specific reform for their particular environment. Although change can be unsettling, due to fear of the unknown, educators need to be brave and create meaningful curricula specific to their students. The refusal to quit, whether conscious or not, is a choice. As a future educator, I need to make the conscious decision to never quit on a student. Equally important, I vow to provide the necessary tools to my students so they do not quit on themselves.

¹⁹ Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 114.

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