

Philosophy of Education

Standardization and Specialization for an Ideal Educational System

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Educational System

The American Public education system is important because it is the one system that reaches an entire generation of American citizens and residents. This gives the system an incredible power to shape society into its ideal and influence a generation as a whole, a power whose focus is often unclear or ignored. I think that the system, in its current state, is failing because of uncertainty in relation to its purpose. With regards to this, I believe that it is important to shape an education system that provides students with the same, and equal, skills and knowledge while gearing curriculum to fit individual needs, not by zip code, but by learning style. By elaborating on the purpose of schools, the necessary knowledge to be taught, my testing ideologies, and potential solutions to some existing problems, I hope to develop a philosophy of education that addresses society and students' needs from education.

According to me, the purpose of the American Public Education system is to give students the freedom of choice for their future after high school, regardless of whether they choose to go to college or work. According to a study by Hernandez, 22% of students who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school (Hernandez, 5). This not only creates an achievement gap between students of low and high-income families, but also perpetuates class differences and prevents mobility between socio-economic classes. Education, if designed and implemented well, has the power to eliminate these differences. I think that schools should provide students with the skills and knowledge required so that students have the

power of choice when they graduate high school. Students should be able to choose whether they want to proceed to college or pursue a job without being limited by the competencies given to them at school. To avoid these achievement gaps and class differences, it is important that we maintain a balance between the content and skills taught in schools (Hirsch, 107).

A balance between skills and content can be maintained by using instructional techniques that incorporate both types of knowledge in any lesson. Proponents of associative learning have emphasized the importance of learning being a process of associating prior knowledge with new input. Neuroscience studies have shown that when learning new information, it is important to make backward connections to prior knowledge by providing a context to guide learning (Friston, 21). Shing's emphasis on the process of selection in learning also emphasizes that students tend to link stimuli that are saliently similar or that occur close together in time. This idea is embodied in the Core Knowledge Sequence program that emphasizes coherent, cumulative curriculum. This program allows for the content in ELA, History, geography, Math, Science, and Fine Arts to consistently be related to one another as the students go through different units. In this way, students are able to develop a coherent understanding of the information being taught. Similar to Dewey's idea of the logical organization of information and the psychological experiences of subject matter being key to learning, this emphasis on associative learning should be a standard requirement for content decisions (Walker & Soltis, 47). This content should be taught using activities that support the content and supplement it with skill learning. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory focuses

on the idea that social learning, or learning in collaboration with adults or peers, leads to cognitive development (Riddle, 1,2). Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey focused on the role of education in creating a democratic society by socializing students. Focusing on project-based learning and collaboration between students for social learning, along with learning of contents, will help ensure a balance between skills and content.

The *General Education in a Free Society* report brought up the idea that an ideal education system should be fair to the “hand-minded” and the “book-minded” while meeting the separate needs of each. While instruction must be geared towards the specific needs of each type of learner, I think it is also important to vary testing material to address the differences between learning styles. Many psychological studies show that testing forces individuals to manipulate information cognitively, which makes it a better learning tool than repetition or rehearsal of information. If tests are one of the mechanisms that students employ to engage with and learn content, it is important that this be geared towards their learning style. Tinkham and Kaner (2003) found that specifying tests to a student's learning style not only improves their performance on that test but also their long-term understanding of the material. One of the methods to do this is the Collaborative Examination Technique. Ochoa et al. (2003) explored this technique of having students collaborate on creating an outline to grade assessments, and found that it improves performance on successive tests. This is because it allows them to think of material in different ways and collaborate to process it, thus facilitating learning from assessments. As assessments are also a path to learning and improving understanding, it is

important to ensure that this meets the needs of the different learning styles. While this kind of assessment technique would require a change in standardized testing as it is today, getting teachers across the country on-board with the assessment would allow for standardized evaluation policies without bias against certain types of students.

Two of the key issues in education today have to do with standardization of instruction and of assessment. Mobility in the student population, especially of students in lower socio-economic classes is an important issue. As Hirsch points out, mobile students are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems and to fail a grade level (Hirsch, 110). While there is little that educators can do to stabilize the job market, what we can do is ensure that economic background is not a disadvantage to students. With standardized content and skill for each grade level across the country, students will be able to shift geographical regions without missing out on important information. Such national standards and expectations will also ensure that funding differences and geographical differences are not used as an excuse to cover less material or easier material. At the same time, as the Common Core standards propagate, there should also be consistent expectations for students across the country, in other words, national measures for student achievement (Walker & Soltis). In this way, students across geographical areas and socio-economic backgrounds will be held to the same expectations and will hence strive towards the same expectations. While standardized tests have suffered harsh criticism in recent times, I think if the tests used take different learning styles into account, the majority of teachers and schools would accept them. However, to

ensure fair assessment and varied test types, these would no longer be computerized but would have to be graded by teachers themselves. This would ensure that schools don't just get a number but receive qualitative feedback on their students' performance, which they can use to improve existing practices.

When it comes to the organization of the American Public Education system, the decision-making authority for each school would lie in its own faculty and staff. The Responsibility of the State Education department and School districts would be to acquire information from their schools in terms of strategies that work and don't work and sharing it with the rest of the schools. This would provide schools with a resource to support their work, rather than a pressure that they are oppressed under. This would allow teachers, who spend the most time directly enforcing curriculum and seeing its effect, more of a voice in the system. At the same time, they would receive plenty of support from the other bodies above them, which they can use effectively to create the ideal society of learners that we have envisioned since the time of the common schools.

In conclusion, my philosophy of education is one in which every student is seen as equal and different, and instruction and evaluation is geared towards their differences. By standardizing practices nationally, we could get closer to reducing socio-economic class differences and the achievement gap. While curriculum would ensure a balance between skills and content, it would ensure that students received enough knowledge to have a choice of future careers at the end of high school. Lastly, the education system would be organized such that governing bodies would be more helpful than intimidating to schools and teachers.

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