

What Kind of Education Should Rule the Schools?



An Overview

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” - Nelson Mandela

There has long been discussions regarding the role of high school in our education. As young people are the future of this country, it is imperative to maximize their education to its greatest potential. However, the current public secondary U.S. education system has been mostly standardized and focused on college preparation. The intense focus on grades and preparing for standardized tests like the ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and state exams has forced teachers to teach according to a rigid curriculum that often does not promote critical thinking skills. The focus has been switched to



OCCUPATION
PREPARATION



PERSONAL
GROWTH



LEARNING TO
BE A CITIZEN

THREE APPROACHES FOR SHAPING EDUCATION

- **Occupation Preparation**

- Stress academics and teaching specialized, marketable skills

- **Personal Growth**

- Promote interpersonal skills and the development of a well-roundedness, holistic person

- **Learning to Be Part of a Community**

- Focus on being an active community member and citizen of society

acquiring a superficial letter or number grade, not actual learning. Students with different learning needs are forced to fit in a box but still perform well, yet despite all of this effort, US schools aren't even close to scraping the top in terms of education rankings internationally.

According to the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), US schools lag behind other countries and was ranked 38 in mathematics and 24 in science out of 71 participating countries. Furthermore, with the ever-advancing technology, the job market will be extremely different by the time most college-bound students are ready for employment.

It is the students who will be subject to this system. It is the students who will change the world. Should it then be the students who dictate their own education?

Recognizing the flaws of the current secondary education system is a start, but action must be taken.



Approach 1: Occupation Preparation

Traditionally, high schools have existed for students to learn and develop skills “for the real world.” As the world demands young workers with stronger skills (both hands-on and hands-off), it is society’s responsibility to ensure those needs are met for the progress of humanity. This approach to fixing the education system involves more funding for better classes and stronger academic-based clubs for all public schools as well as easy access to trade schools and certifications available within high schools. This style of education reflects the societal value of pragmatism. As of 2009, 76% of public high school graduates had participated in some form of Career and Technical Education (CTE). A study looking into the effect of CTE policy in South Carolina schools revealed CTE students were shown to be more actively involved in looking for possible careers, feel more confident in their career direction and in their preparedness for higher education than non-CTE students. CTE students also cited that having a high school major or career focus helped them to achieve higher grades, have better attendance, and make them less likely to drop out.

Elective classes also play a role in strengthening education. These classes allow students to explore possible interests and engage in more creative projects. Some studies suggest that students are more likely to minor in an



area of study they explored in an elective course.

However, a 2017 international study raised concerns about the efficacy of CTE programs. It concluded students do benefit early in their careers, but are hurt later on because they lack the general skills necessary to adapt in a changing workplace. Whereas, students who received a more general education are setback early on in their careers, but fair better as they become older.

APPROACH 1 BENEFITS

- Fosters curiosity and personal development
- Teaches integral interpersonal skills, or “soft-skills”

APPROACH 1 TRADE-OFFS

- Dependent on skilled teachers and amount of funding
- Over-specialization can limit ability to adapt to changing workplace environment
- Disproportionate benefits depending on socioeconomics conditions

An education system that focuses primarily on teaching students skills and knowledge can better prepare them for the next steps of their lives in terms of higher education or direct employment. However, over-specializing too early in education could limit student’s career outlook. Plus, underprivileged schools are less likely to benefit because their teaching staffs generally aren’t as skilled.



It is important to note that changes in the education system could have a disproportionate impact in schools due to differences in staffing and funding. A career-focused education system aims to increase the efficiency of schooling and accomplish the goal of training tomorrow’s workplace leaders.

Approach 2: Personal Growth

The saying goes that high school is some of the best years of your life. While a statement like that does not go without controversy, most people will agree that students tend to go through some major personal developments in these four years. High school is typically the time for middle school students to enter the doorway of adulthood for the first time, shouldering them responsibilities most students up until that point have never had before.

Students have more control over their schedules, allowing them to pick and choose which classes they’re interested in, cultivating their natural curiosity. The many clubs and organizations in secondary education institutions provide students with more opportunities to get involved, discover their interests, and obtain leadership positions. Higher level courses and deeper involvement in the

school community allows students to learn how to manage their time and handle responsibilities. As people grow up, so do their friend groups, and many kids have to learn to deal with changing relationships and their changing bodies. All of these opportunities provide a fantastic platform for personal growth.

Nowadays, employers are just as focused on soft skills as technical skills in workers. They want employees who can communicate, problem solve in groups, hold themselves accountable, adapt, and operate in a professional manner. Schools that focus on developing soft skills in students result in a more fulfilled education. Students are able to take values such as integrity, responsibility, confidence, curiosity, etc. with them into the workforce, higher education, or wherever they choose to go for the rest of their lives.

Personal growth allows individuals to learn their own strengths and weaknesses both skill wise as well as personality wise, enabling them to increase their strengths while at the same time shoring up their weaknesses.

However, such a focus on personal growth may not be feasible nor effective. With the rising competitiveness of getting into universities, students may

feel pressured to focus on academics and molding themselves into what they think universities want instead of who they actually are. They may take become over-involved in activities and take classes that they believe “look good” on a college application. Many schools focus on teaching students to pass standardized tests, which has caused a negative impact in the classroom. The idea of holding students of different backgrounds with different talents to the same standards detracts from the development of soft skills, stifles creativity, and causes additional stress.

Furthermore, to have such a strong focus on personal development requires more resources and individualized attention. For schools with less funding and many students, it would be rather difficult to gather the resources to focus on personal growth. Some schools don't provide a wide variety of classes for students to pick and choose from.

Finally, high school is a time for change in many students and their relationships. Old friendships fall apart as new ones form. Unwritten social standings and norms are established and as a result, there is a risk of teens developing mental health issues. With mental health issues, schools need to invest even more resources into a help program - resources

that many schools can't afford. Therefore, personal growth can also be hindered by issues outside the school's control.

Approach 3: Learning to be a Citizen

One of the principle reasons for the creation of the schooling system was the establishment of better citizenship in children - at the right age. This form of schooling was introduced within the family unit, on a one-to-one basis, amongst the early humans, until eventually societies were formed and a communal system of education was effectively created. The formal definition of the term, "education", refers to the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. This 'systematic instruction' has often been with respect to behavioral



instructions that are acceptable to society.

Over time, with a varied array of studies becoming available to us, the concept of education evolved. Development of citizenship was limited to earlier forms

According to American Psychologist, Dr. Marilyn P. Mitchell, citizenship is demonstrated in the following ways:

- 1) Responsible Actions
- 2) Leadership
- 3) Innovative Thinking

of education (elementary or middle school), as high school and college transitioned to a more vocational and career oriented form of learning. Is this division of the forms of education justified? Should better citizenship be an important part of the adult schooling system, or is its limitation to younger generations sufficient?

Schools today are experimenting with methods of instilling innovative thoughts in children, a practice that was lost in the past few years where rote-learning and technical knowledge was favored. The newer systems of education like the International Baccalaureate and the Cambridge IGCSE favor the growth of

these skills in students, that make them better analytical thinkers, collaborators, innovators and essentially better leaders. This remains the essence of education in these systems of schools, up until they are ready for college. Even subject-specific instruction is given by urging the students to think differently, and courses on Science, Math, Economics etc. are all taught through a hands-on project based approach rather than textbook instruction.

Since all of these changes to our system of education is being made to revert the focus (back) to better citizenship, should public schools too accept this change? Is this form of learning the best way to create smart and able citizens or would this reduce the benefits of specialization that technical and vocational schools focus on? The answer to that would be evident in the years to come.

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