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Philosophy of Education

For decades people have questioned and challenged traditional schooling and the negative effects it may have on students. Some argue that children should not learn in a schoolhouse, but from self-education throughout their lives. I believe that without some structure a child would not know where to turn, but with guidance from others, children should self-motivate and use creativity to obtain their own knowledge, whenever and wherever, throughout the entire span of their lives. An education relies on the desire for knowledge.

Knowledge (n): acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation; general erudition, (dictionary.com). Knowledge is something that can be defined in a dictionary, but how can we as students, teachers, as humans, obtain it? Being acquainted with a fact does not necessarily mean you are a knowledgeable person. To acquire knowledge I believe a person must want to acquire it. The internal desire to learn and know is what drives those who have become some of the most successful and accomplished people in the world. In order to gain knowledge a student must be capable of thinking critically about what they are presented with. In Rereading America, Colombo describes the importance of critical thinking:

Instead of simply collecting the “facts,” a critical thinking probes them, looking for underlying assumptions and ideas… she probes for the motives, causes – an explanation of how these things came to be. A critical thinker cultivates the ability to imagine and value points of view different from her own – then strengthens, refines, enlarges, or reshapes her ideas in light of those other perspectives…in short, a critical thinker is an active learner, someone with the ability to shape, not merely absorb, knowledge.

Simply accepting is not sufficient to learning; probing, questioning and discovering your own meaning behind facts and truths is how knowledge is truly obtained.

In our society children go to school as a chore, something they are forced to do unwillingly. The desire to expand and explore their mind and world is lost. The role of the student should be similar to an explorer, they should want to discover knowledge on their own, the chance to truly learn instead of being told. My belief is that students know that all they must do is memorize and recite to get a good grade; they lack a thirst for true knowledge. There is no desire to create and expand, to come up with new ideas. If ‘going through the motions’ gets a student a good grade, then why should they do more? Is it because they falsely believe that they cannot achieve success without good grades and degrees? Gatto explains how our society correlates schooling to success, “We have been taught (that is, schooled) in this country to think of "success" as synonymous with, or at least dependent upon, "schooling," but historically that isn't true in either an intellectual or a financial sense”. Inner motivation is what drives those who have been most successful in history, not years and years in a schooling institution. Those who do not rely on schooling alone are those who achieve great and seemingly impossible things.

The title ‘teacher’ implies that only a person with that particular title is qualified to teach. If it is true that education has no boundaries than it is true that anyone can learn from anything and anyone, there should be no authority that limits learning. A school teacher should help students go in the right direction, but let the student use their own creativity to discover the knowledge. A mentor should share their own experiences, not point a person in one particular direction, but allow them to hold the power to decide. Freire states, “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow”. The preceding quote represents Freire’s idea of a libertarian, problem-posing education system. His belief coincides with my own that not only students but teachers must become open-minded active learners to successfully pass on their own knowledge to the students. The teachers should be learners as well, not bound by the preconceived notion that they ‘already know everything’. Opposite to that is Freire’s belief in what our system is currently:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.

The idea of banking, I think, reflects many unfortunate truths in today’s schooling system. Students no longer strive for excellence to better themselves, they strive to get good grades to impress others and prove how ‘smart’ they are, when in truth they are only good at being depositories.

Einstein explains in the following quote how a student who feels inadequate, due to the overwhelming authority of the instructor, is not able to express their thoughts and ideas in a school setting, “To me the worst thing seems to be for a school principally to work with methods of fear, force and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the sound sentiments, the sincerity, and the self-confidence of the pupil”. Through my personal experiences I have found that you cannot grow and expand intellectually unless you choose to and feel comfortable doing so. In high school I spent numerous hours working on the yearbook, a project that I chose to commit myself to for my entire senior year. I learned more in that class than any other ‘academic’ class. I became good friends with the teacher because she treated me as an equal and a friend, I could relate to her and feel comfortable questioning her ideas as she did mine. This showed me that a good relationship with the one you are trying to learn from is a connection that is essential to learning.

In conclusion, a student and teacher must build a relationship and learn from each other in order to establish a true education and those who rely on good grades to become successful may fall short. The schooling system will continue to be criticized for the lack of inspiration within the institutions. The search for true knowledge will never end because knowledge has no boundaries. Ultimately, those who desire to obtain knowledge will do so because they have the drive not to be triumphant but to be educated and knowledgeable.