

The use of the word “education” was first used in its present meaning—providing schooling—in 1588 by Shakespeare (Harper, 2001). The idea existed far before this, though. Education, as teaching, has existed since at least the beginning of humans and, arguably, since the beginning of involved parenting by animals. Its Latin etymological roots show these original forms as well as the earliest and most persistent argument. The Latin term, *educare*, from which “educate” is derived, means “to bring up or rear,” indicating the truth apparent to most: education’s earliest form was simply that of parent and child (human or otherwise). The primarily polar argument that has existed since very early on in the story of humanity has been that of the purpose of education. Is the purpose to impart or educe knowledge and understanding? The English language proves a victory, albeit a subtle one. *Educare* is derived from the terms *ex-* and *ducere*, which, loosely translated, means “to lead out” (Harper, 2001). The details of the argument have changed, and there is increased deference for the center of the poles. Discussion now is focused on looking at these two positions as being qualities on a spectrum, not exclusive opposites.

In Western History, the debate goes back to the Greece, where the imparters were the Sophists and the “educers” were the Socratic and Platonic educators.

Ornstein and Levine (2006) explains that for the Sophists, knowledge was valuable only insofar as it was directly and obviously useful in producing a desired outcome. Moreover, knowledge itself was defined by its usefulness and thus was relative to the present situation. Thus education was an exercise in very specific skills designed to

sway others. Although this education was accomplished through a sophisticated system of modeling and direct student experience, the purpose of education was to instill these particular, although relative skill sets (p.68-69). The Sophists succeeded in proving that experiential learning does not necessarily imply student-centered learning. Ornstein and Levine (2006) shows the sharp contrast of the Socratic and Platonic camps in their formation of the universal truth, as well as their deeply held belief that this truth was innate in each individual student. The job of the Socratic and Platonic educator, then, was to educe truth from the mind of each student and ask questions resultant in knowledge of truth. To Plato's student, Aristotle, this education provided the necessary outlook on truth as universal, but lacked application, or even confirmation in the real world. Aristotle was a realist and believed that while truth could be universal, it was not wholly internal. This truth was still derived from sensory experience in a physical world. Aristotle's goal was to ensure rationality in his students: while truth was universal and accessible through contemplation, the process of internalizing the external world needed to be accomplished in specific ways (p. 69-74). In these early Greek systems of education, often considered primary in influencing the current models, the polarization crystallizes. However, Aristotle and then Isocrates come along as well, introducing the middle road between the two as both intelligent and intuitive.

The argument persisted throughout the centuries in many different permutations and interpretations, as it had previously. Central to every idea in

education, though, is the idea of the culture at large. Education is a hope to encourage what is right and improve all about a society and the people in it. Every change reflected—and reflects—the most deeply held values: the role of persons in family, community, culture, government, and society; the source of wisdom and knowledge; the value of an individual versus the groups to which he or she belongs—in short, the sources, processes and highest aspirations of personhood itself. As Gardner (2000) admits, “In the end, education has to do with fashioning certain kinds of individuals—the kinds of persons I (and others) desire the young of the world to become” (p. 19).

Today, these positions as well as their relationships to each other and education closely parallel the values of US culture in general. Since its inception, the culture of the United States has been centrally concerned with how to fit expanded individuals’ freedoms within the traditional framework of the larger society, and, more generally, how to align traditional and progressive ideas with each other to create a cohesive whole. The search for freedom has created a unique situation, in which many are seeking similar goals in life, but are supported by an array of widely varying values. The United States’ national identity is complex; freedom has become, in large part, the largest common morality. Knowledge itself has been heavily influenced by the advent of the information age. Subjectivity may or not be valued by any given individual in the US, but it is a fact of life. Even universal truth and objective fact have many different lenses through which the image changes. What,

then, is the still salient purpose of education? Gardner (2000) lists, "...The quartet of purposes that spans educational time and space: to transmit roles; to convey cultural values; to inculcate literacies; and to communicate certain disciplinary content and ways of thinking" (p. 35-6). Before true teaching takes place, the teacher must define each of these. To some, teaching about roles will mean imparting those possible roles, to others, discovering them with students. To some, cultural values will include hard and fast rules of morality, to others, an inner simplicity of purpose. To some, literacies will be based solely on linguistic and logical-mathematic interpretations of everything, to others, self-searching and then possibly the skill of translating into those two disciplines of mind for academia. The last purpose is largely beyond this debate, however, as "disciplinary content and ways of thinking" are defined by their adherence to traditional forms but only insofar as those forms create a framework for independent thinking. However viewed, these four points encompass nearly all of the perceived purposes of education, giving voice and dignity to all of them, and their interconnectedness. Be it in suppressing or encouraging human nature, building influential politicians or independent citizens, imparting or educating knowledge and wisdom, these four points are the necessary purposes of education. The question remains as to how these purposes will be fulfilled: Should education seek to impart or educate?

In the US, the imparting is usually touted by traditionalists. In this mindset, standards are tantamount. The central goal is to make sure that each student knows

what he or she “should.” While not essential to these standards, it is also typical that a traditionalist will continue, in whatever new format, the methods established at the beginning of decontextualized education. Memorization and rote learning are essential. While any teacher admitting that this was the preferential approach would effectively be committing professional suicide, it persists in many classrooms.

Primary level history tests in which children are forced to recall dates and near exact repetitions of information, rather than show some degree of developmentally appropriate understanding about the stories and their impact are particularly telling of this. Far too often, these tests are taught to by mnemonic device and repetition.

One of the most well known proponents of traditionalist educational methods, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has supplied the world with a series of books that give facts, figures, and specific skills that every student should know by the close of each school year.

While standards, of themselves are not damaging, in this mindset there is no room to breathe. Children are seen as either on-par or not. If the standards are not met, there is little room for the student to progress from that point, forever destined to be left behind. This is a reflection of the traditionalist (or, quite possibly, fundamentalist) perspective of human nature. As Hirsch (1996) tells it,

“The aim of education is not to follow human nature but to correct it, to set it on a path of virtue that is often contrary to its natural development. To give one’s fallen natural instincts free rein would beget a life of greed, selfishness, and crime” (p. 12)

No wonder there is such little room. This one brief statement says much about the purposes of education. There is but one path to achievement within this mindset, and achievement within these ideals not only results in knowledge, it defines the path of turpitude or adherence to virtue. While values are one of the important purposes, any implication that education is the only source thereof is blatant collusion towards subjugation and the furtherance of socioeconomic disparity. The absence of even the possibility of an inherent moral compass is the loss of all hope in humanity. The truth of this particular view of education, and the danger of any that veers too closely to it, is that students are left only with a perpetuated—not improved—world.

That improvement can only truly be supported by supporting the minds of individuals to expand past what is already on the academic table. This is the view commonly associated with progressivists. However, I prefer the term “educers.” These educators’ seek to help students interpret inherent knowledge, wisdom, and understanding and make them accessible. What makes this end of the educational ideological spectrum unique is that it is far from a polar end. True to Hegelian dialectic form, it springs not from either end of the spectrum, but from the tension between the two—the very spectrum itself. This framework espouses the importance of balance. Past interpretations of knowledge are important. They are not inimitable. Individuals have inherent knowledge.

There is a certain gentleness associated with this mindset, as growth is not wholly defined by amassing knowledge. Growth is, rather, an individual’s

continually expanding ability to access this knowledge. The knowledge imparted consists primarily of frameworks for communication with existing establishments. Educers take a middle-of-the-road stance, understanding that not everything is readily accessible, but also understanding that those frameworks are a goal, and that the possible processes for achieving that goal are numerous. Students have not only an inherent knowledge, but an inherent desire to learn. Darwin said, “It may be more beneficial that a child should follow energetically some pursuit, of however trifling a nature, and thus acquire perseverance, than that he should be turned from it, because of no future advantage to him” (qtd. in Gardner, 2000, p. 76). This is the primary, as yet immeasurable goal of every educating educator. Standards are not wholly excluded. Progress must be measurable.

There must be ways to verify that students are gaining understanding and the ability to express what is necessary to operate in their world. Educators should advocate firmly for the usage of each of the various intelligences and the value of their expression but cannot lose sight of the fact, however unfortunate, that much of the world—particularly in collegiate academia and traditional business—finds value almost exclusively within the logical-mathematic and linguistic realms. A shift in this exclusivist value system is overdue. Perhaps, once that cultural paradigm shifts, standards will be able to be more even-handed. As it stands, there are very few individuals with the ability to write unbiased standards or their assessments. For now, students must learn translation. For now, it is the job of every educator to teach

each student how to operate in this world, as it is, whilst advocating for the acceptance and value due historically underrepresented ways of thinking. As this expansion reaches the tipping point, the focus of translation, instead of pushing everything into the bounds of linguistic and logical-mathematic intelligences, may be able to encourage conversation between each of the different ways of thinking, resulting in still greater expansion.

Gardner (2000) also details the conveyance of truth, beauty, and goodness as the ideal educational basis. This curriculum assumes inherent understanding. It provides a myriad of choices to exhibit that triumvirate, within each and among all cultures. It joins the two, individual and culture, by teaching the “quartet of purposes” and what underlies each of them. This simplicity should be at the heart of all curricula, and all teachers. Truth, beauty, and goodness are universal ideals with an infinite number of manifestations, just as each child is a unique manifestation with indecipherable, profound possibilities.

References

- Gardner, H. (1991). *The unschooled mind: How children think and how schools should teach*. United States: BasicBooks.
- Gardner, H. (2000). *The disciplined mind: Beyond facts and standardized tests, the K-12 education that every child deserves*. New York: Penguin. (Original work published 1999)
- Harper, D. (2001, November). Educate. In *Online etymology dictionary*. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=educate&searchmode=none>
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1996). *The schools we need & why we don't have them*. New York: Doubleday.
- Ornstein, A. C., & Levine, D. U. (2006). Curricular foundations: The purposes of education. In *Foundations of education* (9th ed., pp. 394-413). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Ornstein, A. C., & Levine, D. U. (2006). Education in ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. In *Foundations of education* (9th ed., pp. 66-76). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.