

Sample Classical Argument

Is Schooling Conducive to Learning?

If students get As on a test then they know the material, right? How many of those students would still know the information if you asked them about a week later? How about a month later? Most students will not remember most of the information for very long after the test. Why is that? They learned it, didn't they? Well, that depends on how you define "learning". "Learning" is gaining knowledge and experience which stays in the long-term memory and is of value to the recipient. So we have to ask, is our education system really teaching children? The way education is set up in this country is simple. There is usually only one teacher in a classroom teaching from 12 to 30 students at a time. Information is written on a blackboard in the front of the room while the children take notes and listen. There may be some variation depending on the school and teacher. Then the students are tested on the material. After the test, the class moves on to new information. The material is usually not looked at again until a final test at the end of the semester, for which students study very hard the few days before. If they pass the test it is assumed that they "learned" the information, regardless of if they forget it later. Our education system is not only not enhancing learning but may actually be inhibiting it.

The education system in the United States today treats the minds of children like bowls to be filled with information. What it does not realize is that if you fill a bowl too quickly most of the liquid will bounce back out. It is the same with the mind of a child. When they are given too much information in such a small amount of time very little of it is actually retained. This is because of the vast amount of information students are given in very small amounts of time. Children study a single topic for two weeks to a month and then they are tested on it. After the test they study something different for the next two weeks to a month. This causes the previous information to be forgotten and replaced by new information. This means that children end up with only very general knowledge of the topics studied. A few children do learn this quickly, but not very many. Children learn at greatly varying paces, however, schools assume that all children learn at the same speed. This causes many children to be very frustrated and to give

up trying to learn. Many children who learn at a slower pace fall behind beyond any hope of catching up. Often the children who learn more quickly get bored and give up completely. Many of these children begin associating learning with boredom or frustration and actually start to dislike and even fight against learning.

Children also all learn in different ways. Many times when a child is unable to learn something the way it is presented in schools they are told it is their fault or they simply fail. Usually no one looks into the reason that a child is failing or struggling. It is assumed that they just aren't trying hard enough. This is very unfair to the child because it cheats them out of discovering their full potentials and strengths. By cheating children this way we are also severely crippling their self-esteem. Children know that they have greater potentials, but they will stop believing it if they feel like their best is not enough. When they feel this way they will often stop trying because they feel that they will never achieve anything. I know a man who went through much of this as a child. He has a learning difference and was unable to keep up with most of his classes. The teacher told his parents that if he sat quietly in the back of the room she would pass him. His parents pulled him out of the public school and sent him to a smaller, catholic school where he received more individual attention. His parents also worked with him more at home. This worked well until he got into high school. There he figured out how to look at a textbook once or twice and pass a test on it. He figured out how to use the tricks within a test to get the right answers. While this gave him good test scores, he was learning very little. Developing this skill cheated him out of learning many fascinating and useful things. He is now one of the most intelligent people I know because partway through college he saw that he was missing a lot and the consequences of that. He decided to really begin to work at learning.

I am another example of this. My first few years of school were at a public elementary school. I learn very quickly and so I became bored. Eventually I stopped paying any attention to doing any work. My teachers treated me like I was incapable of learning what I easily learned in five minutes. My parents then put me into a school for gifted and talented children and I slowly regained my love of learning. Neither of these are very unusual cases. The only thing that is unusual is that most children do not find ways of fixing the problem, they just continue to sit in the back of the room bored and never discover the joys of learning. My friend and I were lucky to have parents who gave us all of the opportunities that they could to allow us to learn.

The grading system and homework are also not conducive to learning. They take the focus off of learning and put it on to pleasing the teacher. Homework makes it difficult for students to focus on learning because they are too busy writing essays and filling out

worksheets to focus on the material itself. It changes learning from a pleasure to a chore. Children begin to dislike learning because they are too busy trying to get an "A" to focus on anything else. Children are told that they have to get good grades to be good children. They are punished for getting things wrong. This is bad because often making mistakes is the best way to learn. Mistakes are seen in a very negative light and children are given low grades and told that mistakes are bad. Students should not be discouraged from making mistakes because often they learn more making mistakes and identifying them as such than from simply doing everything correctly from the start.

Grades cause children to feel dumb when they make mistakes. There are many brilliant children who get low grades simply because they don't do their homework. The teachers are then baffled when the child gets a good grade on a test. The students don't end up with good grades because they didn't do the homework, however they may have learned more than any other child in the class. So why do we have grades? If they aren't measuring learning, what are they for? All that they really do is measure who does the most homework and who gets into the good graces of the teacher. Many students are turned away from learning because of grades. Good grades must not be equated with learning because they are very different things.

It may be argued that within schools there are often special programs for children with different abilities. These programs help some, but there are problems. Often children don't want to be put into a special class because it would make them stand out. Many children would rather be confused or bored than stick out among their peers. They will do anything to not stand out, even sit in a classroom and be bored to the point of insanity. There are children who learn to fake their way through school just so that they won't have to stand out. The children who are in those programs often have serious problems with self-esteem. The other problem is that many schools are underfunded and the special programs are usually the ones that lose money first.

People feel that grades are important because they are our way of measuring how well a child is doing in school, but what exactly is being measured? If grades are meant to reflect how well a child has learned something they are not being implemented correctly. Often things such as tardies, absences, and class participation are part of grades. These things really have nothing to do with how much the child is learning. Being late for class does not seriously impair a child's learning abilities, neither does missing a few classes, as long as they get the information. Class participation is no reflection on how well someone is learning, a child can sit in the back of the room and not say a word the whole class period and still walk away having gained more knowledge than anyone else in the class. Grades also do not measure how much

work a child is putting into the class (although they are supposed to). Some students are able to put very little work into a class and receive an A, while other students work very hard and only receive Cs.

It is commonly thought that schools give people the knowledge they will need in life. Is this really true, however? How much do students actually gain for life in schools that they couldn't learn in a better way? Wouldn't it be more beneficial if students were taught things in ways that showed them the practical uses of the information? What if students were shown how interesting information is and how to find a use for it? What if they could figure out uses for the knowledge themselves? There has to be a better way of giving information to everyone than through schools. A way that does not turn people away from learning. Schools make learning a chore rather than a pleasure. When someone feels that something is a chore they are more likely to fight against it. There has to be a way to make learning a pleasure, because that's what it should be. Children should be shown how important learning is, and schooling is not the way to do it.

Our system of schooling is not set up the way it should be. It was created to enhance learning, to teach children what they needed to know. It has strayed from that purpose. Our school system not only does not teach, but it turns students away from learning. Our children deserve better than this. They deserve to be shown how much fun and how beneficial learning can be. Learning can be what gives our lives value, but we are cheating our children of that. The school system needs to be seriously looked at and changed. The future of our world could be shaped by how well our children are prepared for it. They will be better prepared for it if they are shown how important and how rewarding knowledge and confidence can be. If our children are given these building blocks then they will become stronger adults and they will enhance the structure of the human world.