



Speak Out Now

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School – Education or Adaptation?

Almost everyone who is involved in education knows that it isn't working the way it should be. School days can be spent racing from class to class with no time to think. Many just wait for the day to end. Both students and teachers can feel trapped in classes that seem boring or irrelevant.

It is a competitive race. The goal is to get into the best college, and from college, then maybe to graduate school? Or maybe it is to get job training. Is life really only about getting the "best job," the one with the greatest amount of money and prestige? And when so few jobs like this even exist, most people don't even have a real chance.

There is an expectation that our educational system should be an equalizer that overrides the class, racial, gender and other differences imposed on us by society. We are supposed to believe that the impact of growing up without proper nutrition, in an insecure environment, surrounded by all sorts of violence can be overcome simply through education. Of course there are examples of people who go through hell and manage to use school as their shelter from the storms of life. But that is more the exception than the rule.

The more opportunities we have growing up, the more choices we have in life. If you grow up around athletes and want to play a sport, chances are you will have a more developed set of skills. It's the same with music, languages, art, reading and just about everything. We can choose to gain skills as we get older — that's what learning is about. But society doesn't present us all with equal access – far from it. The skyrocketing costs and mounting debt makes college out of reach for most people from the working class.

What is the Goal of Education?

All societies have some form of education. As soon as we are born, we begin being taught how to adapt and function in our society. But what is it that we are learning in school? Are we taught to understand the world we live in so we can play an

active role in changing our society and shaping our lives? Or are we taught how to market ourselves, to adapt and ignore the realities of the world?

Those who decide how to use society's resources have shown how little they value real education. Huge funding cuts to education have eliminated classes, further limiting the opportunities to take electives, like music, art and dance. Class size increases mean fewer options for creative involvement of teachers with students. The focus is on grades and test scores and productivity, not on learning and helping students develop themselves.

When some people lose interest in school and stop trying to learn just to get a grade, often they quit school. It is supposedly their fault or the fault of teachers or parents. But this is what happens when school is simply a place to go through the motions, to plug into what exists. Education should be about developing our talents and applying them. We shouldn't be encouraged to ignore the problems that confront humanity, like global warming, war, poverty, racism, sexism and homophobia. This is not an option if we want to have a future worth living. Are we supposed to ignore these problems until we finish school? Are those who have gone through school actually trying to solve these problems or are they just talking about them?

If the goal of education is to get us to accept our current situation and find a place in the world as it is, it's no wonder that education can seem so meaningless. There are valuable tools and knowledge to be gained but the real question is – what for? We all need tools to understand the world. And the real challenge is to use what we learn in order to explore the deeper questions that we are interested in. And that includes all aspects of life, from medicine to music, to art, to science, to finding the ways to really change the society we live in and not just adapt to it.

Education would be very different if its purpose was to develop all of our creative capacities and provide a fulfilling and engaging life for everyone.